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EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF NONTRADITIONAL
UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN:
PEDAGOGY VERSUS ANDRAGOGY

by

Beverly Ann Hair

Doctoral Dissertation
Submitted to The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology

ADVISOR: Dr. DOUGLAS DAVIDSON

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
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EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN: PEDAGOGY VERSUS ANDRAGOGY

Beverly Ann Hair, Ph.D

Western Michigan University, 2002

Increasing numbers of nontraditional students, of whom many are women, are enrolling in two-year and four-year colleges and universities. The purpose of this study is to critically examine the experiences of nontraditional undergraduate women and their preferred learning environment—pedagogy vs. andragogy. Students were asked to respond to a variety of questions in order to reflect upon their preferred learning environment. The researcher looked for differences in the experiences of 20 (ten Black and ten White) nontraditional female undergraduate college students within their respective institutions based on their race, socioeconomic background, age, and religious background. Also, the researcher focused on why these nontraditional women return to institutions of higher education, whether or not they feel silenced within their institutions, as well as any barriers (situational, institutional, dispositional) they may impinge upon their academic success.

The researcher utilized a triangulation of methods to examine their experiences. These methods included a demographic questionnaire, one-on-one taped interviews, and focus group sessions. The study revealed that the earlier educational experiences, as well as family relationships, impacted why they are nontraditional college students. Also, regardless of race, social class, and/or age, all women are motivated to return to higher

education for similar reasons, and they all experience similar situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers. The narratives revealed that some women do feel silenced within their institutions because of race, age, and gender. Further, nontraditional female undergraduate students prefer a more engaged pedagogy where their past experiences are valued as part of the teaching/learning process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In today's society, many nontraditional female students are returning to institutions of higher education. The number of women over 25 returning to school has increased almost tenfold in the past twenty years, as reentry women have become the largest group of new students to fill the gap created by the declining number of traditional-aged students (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1998). According to Snyder (1987), women over 25 made up 43 percent of all part-time enrollment in higher education; it was projected that by the new millennium, 52 percent of all undergraduate students would be women (Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1980). Some of these students will attend two-year community colleges with the intent to complete two-year programs. Yet, others transfer to four-year institutions.

There are also many nontraditional female students completing undergraduate, as well as graduate degrees from four-year colleges and universities. There is a large proportion of nontraditional female students enrolled both full and part-time. A majority of these students are also enrolled in non-degree programs that are held on and off campus. According to Slotnick, Pelton, Fuller & Tabor (1993), for decades these adult learners have outnumbered traditional college students. "Adults are the fastest growing segment of all the populations in higher education" (Brazziel, 1989, p. 116).

There are many factors that account for this increase in female adult learners. These factors include divorce, growth in one-parent and dual-career households, advanced technology, inflation; and the increase of women who put off pursuing their

educational goals to care for children. Also, a number of nontraditional female college students return to institutions of higher education to prepare for new careers after retirement (Stone, 1994; Slotnick, Pelton, Fuller & Tabor, 1993; Deshler, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; and others). These women feel it is now time to become self-actualized--do what they desire and not what they have been told is their proper "place" or role. Education is viewed by many as the key to economic, social, and occupational advancement; others view education as a powerful tool to get them out of their present circumstance. Many nontraditional females see education as a means to achieve independence and socioeconomic mobility.

Nontraditional female students often enter educational settings established primarily to serve traditional (especially male) college students. At times, these nontraditional female students encounter a hostile climate or low acceptance or a "chilly climate" when their seriousness to pursue their educational goals are questioned. Hall & Sandler (1982, 1986, and 1996) wrote a report on the different treatment of men and women in the classroom. They described this "chilly climate" as "the myriad small inequalities that by themselves seem unimportant, but taken together create a chilling environment" (Hall & Sandler, 1996, pg. 1). This same concept can be applied to nontraditional female undergraduate students.

Many nontraditional female undergraduate students (NFUS) spend limited time on campus because of other responsibilities. Because of these responsibilities, nontraditional female students do not belong to clubs and/or sports teams where they are interacting with traditional-aged female students. Generally, while they are on campus, most of their interactions are with instructors. These interactions with instructors may

influence nontraditional female students' perceptions of the college. Also, many re-entry women experience lower levels of academic self-confidence and are less competitive than traditional female and male undergraduate students (Lewis, 1988; Davies, Lubelska, Quinn, 1994; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1997).

Researchers have investigated the learning environments or settings--andragogy versus pedagogy--of individuals as perceived by themselves and/or by others. The scope of this research has included the preferred learning environments--andragogy or pedagogy--(more fully explained in this chapter) for female nontraditional students, factors which motivate nontraditional female students' return to institutions of higher education, and barriers--institutional, situational and dispositional--, which hinder their academic success. Further, research focusing on the learning environments may bring an increased understanding about the impact of the teaching/learning environments on nontraditional female undergraduate students.

Background of the Study

At this particular juncture in my education, I am a Black female nontraditional Ph.D. candidate, and I have been a nontraditional student since I earned my associate degree, which I completed at the age of 27. As a nontraditional student, I have had a variety of experiences, both positive and negative. It is within this context that I have requested individuals in this study to describe from their personal experiences what it means to be a "nontraditional," "female," "undergraduate college student," and how the classroom environment impacts their experiences, as well as other identification descriptors.

It is through these experiences that I will explore and uncover similarities and differences from their experiences in comparison to my own. A variety of dynamics within my own personal experiences have influenced this investigation. According to feminist researchers, “the personal is political.”

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to critically examine the preferred learning/teaching environments for nontraditional female undergraduate students at a mid-western two-year community college and a four-year mid-western private college. The research will also attempt to identify why nontraditional female undergraduate students return to institutions of higher education and if there are any barriers (institutional, situational, and dispositional) that may impinge upon their academic success. Further, it will attempt to understand how their secondary schooling impacts their present educational endeavors and if their high school experiences played a role in their present status as nontraditional female students. The goal of this research is to enhance our understanding of how nontraditional female undergraduate students are affected by their teaching/learning environments and the impact it has on their college experiences.

Nontraditional female undergraduate students come to community and four-year colleges with their own distinct histories and backgrounds. Once admitted to these institutions, they become resocialized and take on new identities as college students. But, because of their age and family and civic responsibilities, they are set apart from other college students on campus.

Numerous nontraditional female undergraduate students returning to formal educational settings voice their concerns with reference to their skills and feel that they are deficient. They feel that they do not know enough, or they do not know in the right way or that their personal experiences do not count. In essence, nontraditional female undergraduate students feel disconnected and lack self-confidence in their abilities. In their monograph entitled *Educating Learners of All Ages* (1980), Greenberg, Bergquist, and O'Donnell discussed how returning adults are rich in experience and poor in theory, and younger students are just the opposite. They go on to articulate the feelings of returning women--as they know and understand experientially the content of the course. One of the women in this particular study made this comment, "I don't know that I'm learning so much new, but...I'm organizing things, putting a name on them, and they are all falling into place for me." This quote is a perfect illustration of why some women believe that they don't know in the right way.

As a nontraditional student from an associate degree program now working at the Ph.D. level, I have always felt as though I was learning backwards. But once I was able to make sense out of what I was learning, I could connect new material to past experiences. By doing this I was able to use my past experiences as a bridge to acquire new knowledge. Freire (1970) defines this kind of learning as a significant part of the process of becoming a liberated and learned adult (this idea will be expanded on in the literature section). Mitchell & Starr (1971) found that returning female students may encounter in academe a "climate of unexpectation" or in the words of Hall & Sandler (1986, 1991) a "chilly climate," one where women are treated differently, not equal to

men. Indeed, faculty, administrators, and even students, may appear to question the seriousness of returning nontraditional female students (Mitchell & Starr, 1971).

Thus, the focus of this study is to examine and determine if female nontraditional undergraduate students prefer to be educated within a formal (pedagogical) educational environment where the instructor is in control of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the learning/teaching process, or if nontraditional female undergraduate students learn best in an environment where they can share their experiences and learn in a more self-directed manner (andragogy).

This inquiry will allow nontraditional female undergraduate students an opportunity to “voice” and express their own experiences within a two-year and a four-year college environment. Further, this study, by giving returning women an opportunity to use their own voices and telling their own stories, may impact the decisions of faculties and administrators in retention practices and policies related to other nontraditional female students on their campuses.

According to Lewis (1988), it is important for colleges and universities to understand the social context of returning women’s participation, characteristics, and concerns, in order to better facilitate the relevant issues confronting reentry women. Tierney (1993) states, “documenting people’s lives is important because when we do so, we engage in an act of construction of our present worlds” (pg. 64).

Significance of the Study

Education is a combination of both psychological and sociological experiences, with neither being subordinated to the other. The psychological standpoint is composed of the individual’s instincts and motives. Within a sociocultural analysis, the

psychological factors are important, but we must remember and understand that participation is not merely a fact of motives. "It is something that is clearly related to both the individual's position in the social system and also her/his position in the life cycle" (Jarvis, 1985, p. 209). Therefore, this study is significant and unique on several different levels, in that, first, this study will examine why nontraditional females return to institutions of higher education. Is this reason solely psychological or a combination of both psychological and sociological factors? According to Darkenwall & Merriam (1982), the reasons adults return to higher education is multifaceted, as it is the cultivation of the intellect, individual self-actualization, personal and social improvement, and social transformation.

Many nontraditional undergraduate students view education as a form of social intervention and hope that the process will assist them in problem-solving. The problems associated with rapid social change, poverty, a need to be a part of the knowledge explosion, and a number of related educational and social inequalities (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991) are some of the reasons these women found it necessary to return to college.

Secondly, the study will attempt to identify what actually happens within the classroom setting. Do nontraditional female undergraduate students have classes/teachers who respect, expect, and encourage them to speak experientially? Or, do they have classes/teachers who do not value nor respect their experiences and do not encourage them to use their voices in connection with the content of their learning environments.

Thirdly, the study will attempt to ascertain which educational setting these students prefer (pedagogy vs. andragogy). In which environments do they learn or

perform best? Also, the study will attempt to address whether these differences have an effect or impact on the quality of the academic experiences of nontraditional female undergraduate students.

Fourth, the study will focus on the complexity of socioeconomic status and race of nontraditional female undergraduate students attending a public two-year community and a four-year private college. The research will attempt to determine if race/socioeconomic status makes a difference in the experiences of nontraditional female undergraduate students. One of the sites for this study is a public community college in a small mid-western city. The majority of the nontraditional female students attending this community college come from working-class and middle-class backgrounds. In comparison, the four-year private college is located in a mid-size, mid-western city where they admit more nontraditional female students who come from middle- and upper-class backgrounds.

Finally, historically, empirical research on nontraditional female undergraduate college students has relied more on quantitative methods. For this study, I have chosen qualitative methods in order to capture a more in-depth description and analysis of what experiences, interests, concerns, and/or barriers (institutional, situational, and dispositional) face nontraditional female undergraduate students at a public two-year college and a private four-year college. According to Schutz (1964), “the ways that the life world-is, the experiential world every person takes for granted-is produced and experienced by members” (p.).

Research Questions

This study will be divided into three parts. Part I will consist of a short questionnaire that will capture the demographic, socioeconomic background, and family educational background. Part II consists of one-on-one taped interview sessions conducted with each of the twenty (20) participants; and Part III involves an informal focus group at each of the sites listed in this research project.

An overview of the types of questions participants will be responding to include the following:

1. Briefly describe your high school experiences.
2. What motivational factors influenced your decision to attend college?
3. Describe your experience in the classroom setting and discuss which classroom environment works best for your learning style?
4. As a nontraditional female, do you feel that your identity is being silenced by the institution (race, gender, age, or other factors)?
5. What obstacles or barriers make an impact on your academic success (situational, institutional, dispositional)? Note: Within this question the participants will also discuss family/religious support.

Also, other patterns will be examined between first and second-generation college students and between students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in comparison to those from middle to upper-class backgrounds. If barriers exist, an attempt will be made to determine if they are consistent with established categories (institutional, situational, and dispositional). (See Appendix A for the complete list of research questions that provided the framework for this study).

Overview of Methodology

In this study, I plan to rely on a multi-methodological approach in which I will use a combination of forced-choice items in the form of a short questionnaire to ascertain demographic background information. This will be followed by open-ended questions in the form of one-on-one taped unstructured interviews, and finally, an informal focus group will be used. These methods will allow the researcher to acquire the quality and depth of information desired. It will also provide the interviewees an opportunity to share their experiences in their own voices and to share their respective stories.

Outline of Dissertation

Chapter I of this dissertation provides an introduction to the study and its purpose. Chapter II will discuss the related literature, which will focus on the background context for the study, provide a profile of the nontraditional female student, define andragogy, compare and contrast pedagogy versus andragogy, define feminist pedagogy, and identify barriers confronting nontraditional female students as presented in prior studies. The issue of the “chilly classroom climate for women will also be discussed.” Chapter III will discuss the design of the study. This section will present the population and sample procedures, multi-methodological methods of the study, and the limitations of the study. Chapter IV will examine the findings of the study. Chapter V contains the analyses and interpretations of the findings, the concluding remarks, and limitations, as well as recommendations for further research.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are used in this study:

Academic logistical support refers to academic advising, library services, early morning library hours.

Administrative logistical support refers to promotional activities, on-site coordinator, walk-in registration, telephone registration, central location, food services, financial aid, and accessible parking.

Adult Students, as used in this study, refers to students who are age 25 and over and who essentially have the responsibility for their lives.

Andragogy, as defined by Knowles (1980), refers to the art and science of teaching adults.

Barriers in this study was first proposed by Cross & Zusman (1977) and refers to situational, dispositional, and institutional practices and policies.

A “Chilly Climate” for Woman refers to an environment that neglects, devalues, demeans, and marginalizes women.

Core academic support refers to course offerings, flexible scheduling, completeness of programs, tutorial services, and knowledgeable faculty.

Dispositional Barriers are viewed as those barriers that are self-imposed psychologically.

Experiential Learning is defined by Merriam & Cunningham (1989) and refers to learning that takes place outside the classroom--non-school-based educational experiences that might influence an individual's learning.

Facilitation of learning is defined by Brookfield (1986) as the process of assisting adults to make sense of and act upon the personal, social, occupational, and political environments in which they live.

Focus groups is defined by Powell (1996) as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research.

Institutional Barriers refers to those barriers that are outside the control of adult students but are inside the control of the institution. These barriers are grouped into three categories: core academics, academic logistical support, and administrative logistical support.

Lifelong learning refers to the process where individuals continue to educate themselves and develop their knowledge, skills, and attitudes over their life times.

Nontraditional students refers to students who are 25 years of age or older with adult responsibilities; e.g., families, jobs, civic and community.

Pedagogy is defined by Knowles (1980) as the art and science of teaching children.

Personal support system is defined as child-care and health center services and family support.

Reentry female students refers to those who left school to take a job or assume family responsibilities and is now returning to complete their education.

Situational Barriers refers to the circumstances and situations that impede progress of the adult learner; they are further grouped by dimensions of personal support systems.

Traditional Students refers to those students who attend college out of high school and are between the ages of 17 and 24 . These students generally live with parents and do not take on adult responsibilities; i.e., house payments, childcare, tuition payments, etc.

Undergraduate Students refers to those students who are enrolled in two-year or four-year institutions and who have not yet received a baccalaureate degree.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The review of the literature focuses upon the following areas of study: (1) the profile of nontraditional female undergraduate students, (2) the reasons nontraditional students return to institutions of post secondary education, (3) andragogy, (4) pedagogy versus andragogy, (5) feminist pedagogy, (6) the issue of the chilly classroom climate for women, (7) barriers confronting nontraditional undergraduate female students, and (8) focus groups and their use in social research. Also, pertinent socialized concepts and theories will be explored for their relevancy, as well as the issue of race.

Profile of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students

Constructing a profile of the “typical” adult learner in formal organized education can be done in various ways. In studies conducted by Cross (1981), Shipp and McKenzie (1981), Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), Graham and others (1983), and Long (1983a), the “typical” adult learner is usually affluent, well-educated, white, and middle-class (Brookfield, 1986).

The literature defines nontraditional students as those who are 25 and older (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, Knowles, 1977, 1984, 1993, and others). Cross (1981) defines nontraditional students as those adults who return to school full and/or part-time while maintaining other responsibilities such as family, employment, civic duties, and other adult responsibilities. Nontraditional undergraduate female students are also referred to as “adult learners,” “reentry students,” “adult students,” and “returning

students.” Over the last 25 years, the percentage of older students has increased dramatically on many campuses of community and four-year colleges and universities (Slotnick, Pelton, Fuller & Tabor, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; and others).

The profile of nontraditional women is multifaceted, as nontraditional women are diverse in their socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as their age. They range in age from 25 to over 65 years of age, and the majority are between the ages 25 and 50. Nontraditional women are either married, divorced, single, and/or widowed, with or without children. These women have also been referred to as dropouts, “empty nesters,” homemakers, or even veterans (Lewis, 1988). This profile fits the nontraditional women that are a part of this present study.

In 1965, Johnstone & Rivera, in their study *Volunteers for Learning: A Study of the Educational Pursuits of Adults*, defined nontraditional undergraduates as either male or female, white, under 40, working full-time, and middle-class. According to Cross (1981), underrepresented are “the elderly, blacks, those who failed to graduate from high school, and those with annual incomes under \$10,000” (p. 53). This definition of nontraditional students has changed slightly in today’s society. Nontraditional undergraduate students can be male, female, from various race and ethnic groups, unemployed, working full-and/or part-time, and are sometimes over forty. According to the literature, minority groups are still underrepresented in this category. According to Aslanian & Breckill (1980), from one-third to one-half of all college students are classified as nontraditional, and more than 50 percent of all graduate students are over the age of 30. The National Advisory Council for Adult Education (1980) defines the adult

learner as someone who is enrolled full or part-time in any course of study, improving on existing skills, and developing new skills or qualifications.

Nontraditional students are enrolled in traditional undergraduate or graduate level courses. They may take courses in evening school or adult education programs or can be enrolled in customized training programs. They are involved in formal and informal training programs in business, government, or not-for-profit organizations. Or, they may be informal learners who appear at the exhibits of zoos, art museums, etc. Whatever the setting, it is important to understand the profile of adults who want or need to learn something new (Brookfield, 1986; Lewis, 1988; Hayes, 1989).

Why Adults Participate In Education

The question of why adults participate in learning activities will never be answered by any one single reason or explanation. Motivational factors on why adults participate differ for different groups of learners, at different stages of life, and most individuals have more than one reason for learning; generally there are multiple reasons. Generally, nontraditional students return to institutes of higher education for different reasons than those of traditional age college students. Many working adults today are returning to college to upgrade their job skills, change careers, or enhance their chances of employment. Yet, some adults are at the self-actualization stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and they are motivated to pursue their dreams of an education as all of their basic needs have been met. For example, a nontraditional female student in my spring 1999, Introduction to Sociology course was at this stage. Her primary motivation was that her children were grown, out of college, and taking care of themselves. Now, she said, "It is my turn. I have satisfied my obligations to my family." Maslow

emphasizes that the need for self-actualization is a healthy person's prime motivation. In order to be self-actualized, one must maximize one's potential, becoming everything one is capable of becoming. It is this stage that many nontraditional female learners find themselves.

Johnson and Rivera conducted one of the first major national studies conducted on adult participation in 1965. This study revealed eight reasons for participation in higher education, and their relative importance are as follows:

Becoming a better informed person	37%
Preparing for a new job or occupation	36%
For the job I held at that time	32%
Spending my spare time more enjoyably	20%
Meeting new and interesting people	15%
Carrying out everyday tasks at home	13%
Getting away from the daily routine	10%
Carrying out everyday tasks away from home	10%

(p. 143).

The Commission on Nontraditional Study updated Johnstone and Rivera's study in 1972. In this updated version, 20--rather than eight--reasons for participation were discovered. It was found that 55 percent of the individuals surveyed participated "to become better informed," while 43 percent engaged in learning either to get a new job or to advance in their present positions (Carp, Peterson, & Roelfs, 1974, p. 81).

Houle (1961) in his study of adult motivation, categorized adult learners into three subgroups. The first subgroup consists of what he calls goal-oriented learners. These are learners who return to college for specific reasons. Houle identifies these reasons as learning to deal with family problems or to learn new and updated business practices. The second subgroup, activity-oriented learners, are interested in escaping loneliness or boredom. They re-enter college for the sole purpose of developing relationships. The

last subgroup, learning-oriented, consists of those nontraditional students who pursue learning for the sake of learning. Individuals in this subgroup are considered lifelong learners.

Tough (1968), in his study of adult learners, found that these students are motivated by the desire to use and apply what they have learned. In his study, he too identified three different patterns of motivation. The first pattern identifies those individuals who are motivated by others to learn new skills or tasks. This would be an example of learning a new procedure for your job or updating your computer skills. A second pattern consists of a curiosity about controversial issues or things important to the adult learner. An example of this would be taking an African American History course to acquire a better understanding of race relations between Blacks and Whites. The third pattern that Tough identifies was less certain about motivational factors but emphasizes that nontraditional students start with a decision to spend extra time learning, and at the same time, try to decide what to learn. However, Tough believes that the top reasons nontraditional undergraduate students continue their education is for the sheer pleasure of receiving content, feelings of being successful, advancement opportunities, and satisfaction from learning.

Morstain & Smart (1974), *Educational Participation Scale (EPS)*, found six motivational factors, to be central to adults continuing their education. Their six-factor scale extended the three patterns discussed in Houle's study. These six factors are:

1. Social Relationships – this factor reflects participation in order to make new friends or meet members of the opposite sex.
2. External Expectations – participants in this category are complying with the directives of someone in authority.

3. Social Welfare – this factor reflects an altruistic orientation where learners are involved because they want to serve others or their community.
4. Professional Advancement – participants in this category are strongly interested in enhancing their professional opportunities, including career advancement.
5. Escape/Stimulation – this factor is indicative of learners who are involved because they want to alleviate boredom or escape home or work routine.
6. Cognitive Interest – nontraditional students who participate at this level are identical to Houle's learning-oriented adults who engage in learning for the sake of learning itself.

Cross (1981) cautions that there is an important difference in the two approaches:

“Houle was classifying groups of people, whereas Morstain and Smart were identifying clusters of reasons. The implication from Houle's typology is that people are consistently motivated by characteristic orientations to learning to learn throughout their lives, whereas the Morstain and Smart approach makes more room for multiple reasons to exist within the same individual and for motivations to change from time to time” (pp. 87-88).

In 1981, Cross conducted her study on the “why” of participation as related to sociodemographic characteristics such as age, sex, race, education, and income. In this national study, Cross paid attention to the reasons people gave for additional learning, and these reasons mainly centered around their life situations. For example:

People who do not have good jobs are interested in further education to get better jobs, and those who have good jobs would like to advance them. Women, factory workers, and the poorly educated, for example, are more likely to be pursuing education in order to prepare for new jobs, whereas men, professionals, and college graduates are more likely to be seeking advancement in present jobs. Men are more interested in it than older people. Interest in job-related goals begins to decline at age 50 and drops off sharply after age 60. Those who are not currently participating in learning activities (most often the economically disadvantaged and poorly educated) are even more likely to express an interest in job-related education than are their more advantaged peers, who can afford the luxury of education for recreation and personal satisfaction. (1981, pp. 90-91)

Linda H. Lewis (1988), in her study of returning nontraditional female college students, found several motivational factors for their participation. Some of these factors included advanced technology, divorce, and the growth in one-parent and dual-career households by women who had previously deferred career preparation, college, or continuing education. Many women are becoming more politically conscious of a greater need for self-awareness and a need to be self-supporting. These are also factors “affecting women’s life patterns and spurred women’s participation in education and work” (p.1).

Leonard (1994) conducted a research study on 23 nontraditional female students taking part-time evening classes. These students were between the age of 23 and 51, with the majority falling between 30 and 49. Her sample consisted of twelve married participants, five divorced or separated, two single mothers, and four single participants with no children. All of the women in this study classified themselves as working-class.

When these participants were asked what motivated them to return to education, two categories were found: instrumental motivation and personal motivation. The four single participants in her study fell into the instrumental category, as they were motivated by the desire to change their careers or to enhance their present positions. The majority of the remaining participants were motivated for personal reasons, to enhance their self-confidence, or to fulfill a private challenge. However, some of the married women in this study returned to higher education to finish their education before having children, to have children, to fill the gap created by children who are now independent, or to fill the empty nest because their children are no longer in the home.

In the past, the studies on why adults participate in education were generally studied from a psychological perspective. The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors were the unit of analysis. However, Courtney (1991) found that this was not always the case. He found earlier studies on participation in the 1920s through the 1960s which viewed adult participation from a sociological perspective. These studies showed that:

Two of their most significant findings at this time were also findings of adult education surveys. ... Forms of participation were interrelated and reflected the hierarchical structure of the community. Those who turned up in some forms of adult education could also be found in others. In a later study, London (1963) spoke of this as a "general participation syndrome." Social participation was also bound up with socioeconomic status. It was highest among power and cultural elite; the laboring classes tended to avoid formal associations when seeking opportunities for learning and leisure; while the poorer and least-well-off classes tended to shun even these less structured modes, effectively cutting themselves off from any source of organization and power (Courtney, 1985, p. 132).

The sociological concepts and theories explaining why individuals participate in education were reintroduced in recent research studies on adult participation in education. "For the first time ever in the history of decennial handbooks of adult education, for example, the 1990 edition has a chapter on *The Sociology of Adult and Continuing Education*" (Rubenson, 1989, as quoted in Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 92). Keddie (1980), Westwood (1980), Jarvis (1985), Quigley (1990), Courtney (1991), and others have conducted sociological research studies on adults' participation in education. The studies of these individuals focused on the social factors related to participation. These studies looked at sociocultural variables such as material resources and the population density that is a part of the governmental structure. "It is something that is clearly related to both the individual's position in the social system and also his (*her*) position in the life cycle" (Jarvis, 1985, 209). The learner "may well be constrained by social factors of which he (*she*) is unaware, so that sociological correlations are important" (p. 210).

Also, Jarvis (1985) identified six distinct patterns or functions which explained adult participation from a sociological point of view.

1. Reproduce and maintain the existing social system. Adult education, as other forms of education, is meant to socialize its students into the system-to perpetuate class differences.
2. Transmission of knowledge and reproduction of the culture. Adult education reproduces the cultural system which, in itself, is a force for the retention of the status quo rather than social change (p. 139).
3. Selection and advancement of individuals. Jarvis states that this function is where social mobility is upward and generally is experienced by men and younger adults, thus perpetuating society's age and gender-based differences; in other words maintaining the status quo (p. 140).
4. Second chance and legitimization – also reinforces the status quo “the structures of the social system remain unquestioned while giving the appearance of greater equality of opportunity” (p. 143).
5. Leisure-time pursuit and institutional expansion. Jarvis points out that this function once again perpetuates the status quo. Only those who have access to cultural capital – have the time and money to pursue leisure education (p. 147).
6. Development and liberation. At this level individuals were fitting “more easily into the niche prepared for him (*her*)” (p. 148). What is key here is that development and liberation are aims rather than consequences of adult education.

These six functions as outlined by Jarvis (1985) adds a different view of why individuals do or do not participate in adult education. Jarvis (1985) and others found a middle-class bias in the majority of studies on adult participation. Further, the factors of age, sex, and educational background that correlated with adult participation could lead to the understanding of reproducing the division of labor in society.

When the focus is on social structure instead of individual needs and interests, different reasons why adults do or do not participate in education and learning can be discovered. In this regard, sociological, rather than psychological, explanations can be

understood. The adult's decision to participate in learning has less to do with individual needs, but with their place in society and how their social experiences shaped their lives.

Andragogy

Over one hundred years ago Dewey wrote *My Pedagogic Creed*, which consisted of five articles. In his first article, "What Is Education," he discusses in specific details the meaning of education and its importance for all citizens. He believed that:

...all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race. This process begins unconsciously almost at birth and is continually shaping the individual's powers, saturating his (*her*) consciousness, forming his (*her*) habits, training his (*her*) ideas, and arousing his (*her*) feelings and emotions. Through this unconscious education, the individual gradually comes to share in the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting it together (Dewey, 1887, p. 3).

In Dewey's view, education is a dichotomous relationship between student and teacher. I interpret this statement to mean that individuals are social beings, and if we leave out the student's opportunity to participate in their own learning process, we are left with a conglomerate of externally imposed models of learning.

Within many institutes of higher education, the teaching philosophy or pedagogy within traditional learning environments is generally based on what Freire (1970) called the "banking method." This is where teachers make deposits and tell the students what they want them to know. "Banking education" reduces education to an act of depositing, in which the students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (p. 8). In this educational environment the teacher only requires students to receive, file, store, and regurgitate the information deposits students.

For many nontraditional female undergraduate students, learning in adulthood brings to mind the scene of formal classroom settings. They envision the typical

classroom environment where the professor stands behind a podium in front of the class and delivers a lecture (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). It is within this type of setting that the instructor has total control over the planning and teaching/learning process. But is this traditional setting the best for female adult learners? Many nontraditional students bring understanding and experiences into the classroom. The traditional pedagogy leaves the adult learner with no opportunity to utilize their experiences as a point of discovery.

The concept of andragogy can be traced back as far as 1833 to German educator Alexander Knapp. Knapp believed that adults learned differently than children and, therefore, a specific paradigm--andragogy-- was needed that would be unique to adult learners. This concept of andragogy was unknown in the United States but became popularized by the work of Malcolm Knowles. The work of Knowles in relation to andragogy has made an impact in the field of adult education. He defines andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (1970, p.38), and he contrasts this concept with that of pedagogy which is just the opposite--a process of helping children to learn. In *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (1970) Knowles identified four important assumptions about adult learners:

Andragogy is premised on at least four crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from the assumptions about child learners, on which traditional pedagogy is premised. These assumptions are that, as a person matures, (1) his (her) self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one being a self-directed human being, (2) he (she) accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning, (3) his (her) readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his (her) social roles, and (4) his (her) time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his (her) orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject centeredness to one of problem centeredness. (1970, p. 39).

In 1980, Knowles critiqued and revamped his earlier four assumptions (1970) as

follows:

1. Adults both desire and enact a tendency toward self-directedness as they mature, though they may be dependent in certain situations.
2. Adults' experiences are a rich resource for learning. Adults learn more effectively through experiential techniques of education such as discussion or problem-solving.
3. Adults are aware of specific learning needs generated by real life tasks or problems. Adult education programs, therefore, should be organized around "life application" categories and sequenced according to learners' readiness to learn.
4. Adults are competency-based learners in that they wish to apply newly acquired skills or knowledge to their immediate circumstances. Adults are, therefore, "performance-centered" in their orientation to learning.

The first of these three characteristics are at the core of Knowles concept of andragogy; that is, the attainment of adulthood is accompanied by adults viewing themselves as self-directed beings. The concept of nontraditional students as self-directing is based on the assumptions of the social roles performed by adults--spouse, parent, worker, community volunteer, and citizen. Knowles reveals in his writings that "the psychological definition of adulthood is the point at which individuals perceive themselves to be essentially self-directing" (p. 46).

It was Knowles' desire to provide adult education scholars and practitioners with a theoretical framework to better understand how to educate mature adults. Knowles believed that the theory of andragogy would provide such a framework. However, his theory caused a lot of controversy among many scholars of adult education. Cross (1981) in her text, *Adults As Learners*, provides a series of debates over whether andragogy is "a learning theory (Knowles, 1978), a philosophical position (McKenzie, 1977), a political reality (Carlson, 1979), or a set of hypotheses subject to scientific verification (Elias,

1979)” (p. 225). Also, the awareness of andragogy has caused many adult educators (Houle, 1972; Cross, 1981, Davenport & Davenport, 1985; Brookfield, 1986; Feuer & Geber, 1988 and others) to take notice of the ideal of andragogy as a theory of adult learners.

The theoretical model that Knowles outlines consists of designing and operating comprehensive programs for adult learners. His model is geared towards a learner-centered educational process instead of instructor-centered. One of the key factors in Knowles’ model that is distinguished from other models is that the learner is viewed as a mutual partner in the process. As Knowles (1980) states:

The ideal situation is when a group is small enough for all participants to be involved in every aspect of planning every phase of the learning activity. The teacher, of course, retains responsibility for facilitating the planning by suggesting procedures and coordinating the process. With larger groups the ideal situation can be approximated, however, by an imaginative use of subgroups (p. 226).

McKenzie (1977) views andragogy from a philosophical position and argues that if it is not subjected to this analysis, the proponents and opponents of andragogy will continue to “address the issue as if they were sitting around a cracker barrel” (p. 228). He believes that those who do not see the difference between the education of children and adults are basing their argument on classical metaphysics. Further, those who support andragogy are viewing it from a phenomenological perspective. McKenzie (1977) realizes that there are educational scholars on each side of this educational debate; however, he sees andragogy as a more sophisticated philosophical analysis.

Carlson (1979) in “The Time of Andragogy” believes that adult education should proceed along political lines, as the legal and educational rights of adults are different than those of children:

Politically it makes sense to set an age--12, 16, 18, 21, or 25--when one is considered an adult with the rights and responsibilities of an adult. Whatever age the societies establishes politically for adulthood is a reasonable age for most members of that society to shift from engagement in pedagogy (education of children) to involvement in andragogy (adult education). To allow educators to "teach" adults on social psychological guidelines alone, including learning theory and socialization theory, is a political act, in my view an unwise political act. (p. 55).

What Carlson is pointing out here is that there is a dichotomy between adults (voluntary learning) and children (compulsory learning).

Elias (1979) takes the position that in order for andragogy to be considered an educational theory it needs to be validated by empirical research. Thus far, from Elias' standpoint, andragogy has little or no support from research. He further argues that andragogy is but "...a helpful slogan in the adult education movement. Thus, it is not to be taken seriously as educational theory" (p. 255).

Pedagogy Versus Andragogy

The educational model of pedagogy is considered the traditional model of education that assigns the teacher full responsibility for the decision making and planning, how materials will be learned, when it will be learned, and if it has been learned. This traditional model of education is teacher-directed where the student submissively follows the teacher's instructions. This pedagogical model, as explained by Knowles (1980, 1984), is based on several assumptions about students and learning; namely:

1. The student depends on the teacher who has the full responsibility for making all of the decisions related to the learning environment. Therefore, the only role of the student is to submissively carry out the teacher's instructions.

2. Students have little experience that is of any value as a resource for learning; it is the experiences of the teachers and producers of classroom materials and teaching aids that serve as the learning resources.
3. The readiness of the student depends upon what they are told that they have to learn in order to advance to the next grade level; readiness is largely a function of age.
4. Students have a subject-centered orientation to learning; they see learning as acquiring subject-matter content. Therefore, learning experiences are organized according to the logic of the subject-matter content.
5. Students are motivated to learn by external motivators such as, grades, approval or disapproval from teachers, and pressure from parents (p. 8).

Also, in 1984, Knowles contrasted the assumptions of pedagogy and the andragogical model of nontraditional students.

1. The adult learner or nontraditional students are self-directed; they feel that they are responsible for their own lives, which often times causes internal conflict within educational settings.
2. The nontraditional student has both a greater volume and different quality of experiences from youth. The longer we live, the more experience we accumulate in our normal lives. The difference in quality of experiences occurs in adulthood because adults perform a variety of social roles from those of young people. Consequently, in reference to learning experiences, adults are themselves the richest resources for one another.
3. Adults become ready to learn when they experience the need to know how to do something in order to perform more effectively in some aspect of their lives. Readiness, in this sense, is largely associated with the developmental tasks of moving from one stage of development to another, but any change is likely to set off a readiness to learn.
4. Adults are motivated to learn after they experience a need in their life situations; their orientation to learning is life centered, task centered or problem centered.
5. Adults will respond to some external motivators such as job or an increase in salary, but this model suggests that the more potent motivators are internal. (p. 9).

Further, Knowles (1975) outlined a five-step model of self-directed learning which came out of his work on andragogy. These steps consists of:

1. Diagnosing learning needs.
2. Formulating learning goals.
3. Identifying human and material resources for learning.
4. Choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and
5. Evaluating learning outcomes (pg. 8).

Knowles stresses that self-direction is not an isolated process but calls for collaboration and support by the adult student, teachers, resource people, and peers (1975). Specifically, he recommends that teachers of adults become primarily facilitators of learning and assist learners to work their way through the learning process from a procedural rather than a content point of view.

Knowles's (1970, 1975, 1984) ideas of andragogy versus pedagogy first appeared in his text, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy* (1970). In this text he presented these concepts as being different. That is, pedagogy is the appropriate model to utilize when educating children, and andragogy as the preferred model for adults. This dichotomous viewpoint caused many theorists and scholars of adult education to question the significances of andragogy.

In Knowles's (1970) major book that sets forth these assumptions about andragogy, he frequently refers to the "unique characteristics of adults as learners" and to andragogy as a "comprehensive theory of adult learning" (p. 223). However, according to Cross (1981), the concept of andragogy, in contrast to the traditional pedagogy, appears difficult to maintain. Further, Cross (1981) goes on to say that she could not understand if Knowles was advocating two separate approaches to teaching--one strictly for children and another model specifically for adult learners. Or, could adult

educational theorists assume that Knowles is advocating to replace pedagogy with andragogy for adults, and perhaps for children. If so, there would no longer be a theory strictly for adult learners--“rather, a theory of instructions purporting to offer guidance to teachers in general” (Houle, 1972; London, 1973; Elias, 1979; Davenport & Davenport, 1985). Many theorists believe that instead of a diverse relationship between andragogy versus pedagogy, there needs to be an emphasis on unity (Houle, 1972; Day & Basket, 1972; Davenport, 1987). Houle (1972) was a student of Knowles and argued that Knowles’ traits of andragogy could never be used as a theoretical framework to unify a theory of adult learning because he believes that children and adults basically learn in the same way.

Pratt (1984) argues that the ideas of andragogy, as an adult educational theory, are more prescriptive, as it specifies learner’s social roles and instructional traits. He further expresses that this is “dangerously subtle” (p. 149) as the language moves to a concept that is a philosophically based concept to an empirically “valid theory of adult learning held to apply across variations in context, goals, subject-matter, and types of learners” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 95). Further, Pratt (1984) believed that if andragogy is to be viewed as prescriptive, there needs to be empirical research to support whether or not it is indeed a best “prescriptive practice.”

Harare (1984) identifies andragogy as a “descriptive construct” and criticizes it for being unclear and even shaky as a theory for adult education. Harare (1984), like McKenzie (1977), views andragogy as a philosophical construct, which is prescribed as “good” practice in the field of adult education. Day & Basket believe that andragogy

need not be viewed as a theory of adult learning and education, but as “an educational ideology rooted in an inquiry-based learning and teaching paradigm” (1982, p. 150).

These criticisms that were raised by Houle (1972), Elias (1979), Day & Basket (1982), Pratt (1984), and Harare (1984) imply that adult educational theorists should be careful in considering whether or not to adopt andragogy as a theory for adult education (Brookfield, 1986). Pratt (1984) cautions those adult educational theorists of the danger of “ideologist andragogues” (p. 152), who raised what was a prescriptive injunction into unchallengeable, empirically based generalizations. Also, Cross, Hartree, and Pratt warned about the dangers of the uncritical acceptance of andragogy as an academic orthodoxy and how it may emerge in the field of adult education (Brookfield, 1986).

Supporters of Knowles’ theses about andragogy as a theoretical model for adult education believe that a different approach for adults and children is warranted (McKenize, 1977, 1979). Yet, Lebel (1978) and Yeo (1982) agree with Knowles’ concept of andragogy and believe that andragogy could even go a step further. They believe that not only do adult learners differ from children, but younger adults differ considerably from older adults. Their concept could indeed call for another classification, “gerogogy” or “eldergogy.” But opposers of this kind of thinking fear that too much segmentation of education would not lead to a better understanding of how adults learn.

Finally, Knowles (1980) gave up the idea that his concept of andragogy would serve as a unifying theory or framework for adult education. He did acknowledge that it is a method or an approach to adult learning. Further, andragogy and pedagogy are parallel instead of dichotomous paradigms. However, he still believes that andragogy is

an approach that is more suitable for adults and pedagogy is a better educational model for children. Guglielmino (1977), Griffin (1983), Pratt (1984), and Davenport (1987) were very critical of Knowles in his continual assumptions about the theoretical significance of andragogy without support of empirical research.

Hartree (1984) also very strongly expressed her concerns about the sensibility underlying the theory or practice of andragogy. She criticized Knowles' assumption that adult learners were self-directed. She concludes that Knowles' assumption about adults being self-directed is more of a pious hope than descriptive of how adults learn; instead in her view, this assumption is more prescriptive. Cross (1981) and Clardy (1986) each support Hartree's views.

Although there is a series of debates around the concept of andragogy and its significance in the field of adult education, significant attention was gained from numerous practitioners and scholars. The following observation regarding andragogy by Cross (1981) provides some very helpful insights:

Whether andragogy can serve as the foundation for a unifying theory of adult education remains to be seen. At the very least, it identifies some characteristics of adult learners that deserve attention. It has been far more successful than most theories in getting the attention of practitioners, and it has been moderately successful in sparking debate; it has not been especially successful, however, in stimulating research to test the assumptions (pp. 227-228).

Further, Cross (1981) believes that andragogy has elevated the awareness of three central questions:

- (1) Is it useful to distinguish the learning needs of adults from those of children? If so, are we talking about dichotomous differences or continuous differences? Or both?
- (2) What are we really seeking? Theories of learning? Theories of teaching?
- (3) Do we have, or can we develop, an initial framework on which successive generations of scholars can build? Does andragogy lead to researchable questions that will advance knowledge in adult education?

Here, Cross (1981) is giving us a way out of this controversy--andragogy versus pedagogy--and steering those, who are involved in the education of adults to move beyond assumptions and focus on empirical research that will validate adult theory and the practice of teaching adult students.

Facilitating Adult Learning

Facilitating adult learning is an alternative interpretation of andragogy. Facilitators are sometimes referred to as andragogues (Knowles, 1984) who treat adult students very different from the ways in which children are treated. Although there has been considerable debate regarding the soundness and epistemological validity about the concept of andragogy as an adult education practice, the major focus of andragogy is the concern for the capacity of adults being self-directed learners (Knowles, 1975; Brookfield, 1985; Long & Associates, 1988). This concern for self-directedness has caused many adult educational theorists to foster the concept of self-directedness as the chief purpose of facilitation.

Facilitation has been defined as an artistic enterprise which can never be reduced to a specific set of rules that is applied to all learning environments (Hostler, 1982; Lenz, 1982). Tough (1979) views facilitation as the process of helping, as facilitators have high regards for the learners' ability to plan and engage in equal dialogue with facilitators. Brookfield (1986) in his text, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning*, informs his readers on the importance of incorporating elements of challenge, confrontation, and critical analysis of the self and society within the concept of facilitation. Further, Brookfield along with Galbraith (1991) argues that facilitating is a transactional process in which the personalities, philosophies, and priorities of the facilitators and participants

interact continuously to influence the nature, direction, and form of the desired learning. "In an effective teaching-learning transaction, all participants learn; no one member is regarded as having a monopoly on insight, and dissension and criticism are regarded as inevitable and desirable elements of the process" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 24). This type of active and collaborative learning process has been recognized by others such as Dewey (1916), Lindeman (1926), Bryson (1936), Bereguin (1967), Rogers (1969), Freire (1970), Houle (1972), Kidde (1973), Knowles (1980), Knox (1980, 1986), Brookfield (1986), Daloz (1986), Marsick (1987), Galbraith (1990a), and others. The transactional concept is not a theory, but a practice that facilitators and learners can utilize to make the experience a rewarding, meaningful, and a cooperative activity. The descriptive features of the transactional process include collaboration, support, respect, freedom, equality, critical reflection, critical analysis, challenge, and praxis (Galbraith, 1991).

Brookfield (1986) identifies six principles for effective practice for facilitating adult learning. First, participation is voluntary, and facilitators do not have to deal with defiance, opposition, and/or indifference between learners. Secondly, mutual respect is stressed; good facilitation is characterized by respect for participants' uniqueness, self-worth, and separateness. Third, a collaborative spirit is essential, as participants work together to explore issues and concerns and then collaborate on the results of their explorations-along with the facilitator. Fourth, the facilitator must allow participants to focus on action and reflection, where the facilitator utilizes the concept of praxis set forth by Dewey (1916), Neill (1960) and Freire (1970). This process focuses on the need for the educational activity to engage the adult learner in a process of continuous investigation and exploration, followed by action, then followed by reflection on the

specific action decided on by participants. According to Brookfield (1986), “this means that explorations of new ideas, skills, or bodies of knowledge do not take place in a vacuum but are set within the context of learners’ past, current, and future experiences” (p. 16).

Critical reflection is the fifth process by which the facilitator develops within the learners heightened sense of the need for critical awareness, where the adult learner is able to critically question, examine, and assess any assumptions underlying the acquisition of skills or bodies of knowledge (Brookfield, 1986, p. 17). The sixth and last principle of effective facilitation calls for the facilitator to be responsible in assisting adults in becoming self-directed learners. Using this process, the facilitator provides learners with alternatives to their present way of thinking, behaving, and living. “Adults who engage in this kind of double-loop learning in which they reflect critically on their assumptions and try to imagine alternatives are fully autonomous, self-directed learners. Such adults are likely to be involved in a continual reinterpretation, re-negotiation, and re-creation of their personal relationships, work lives, and social structures” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 19-20).

Andragogues or facilitators stress the democratic and student-centered nature of their practice. In other words, facilitators do not direct adult learners; they assist them in becoming fully functioning adults. This view of facilitation emphasizes the primacy of the learner and grants substantial control to learners and places the learner directly in the context of the learners’ own experiences.

According to Merriam & Cunningham (1989), there are varying interpretations of facilitation which is situated within three distinct paradigms: the behaviorist, the

humanist, and the critical. I believe that this concept of facilitation could also be considered a process of improvisation. I define improvisation as a unique blend of experiences, knowledge, and minds coming together to develop an idea, which leads to transformation as a consequence of sincere exchange. When adult learners engage in improvisation, their creative energies emerge from the minds of those involved. This takes place when they are brought together for a specific purpose such as probing for deeper meanings, examining other points of view, and gaining new insights or knowledge. Facilitation, in this sense, can provide each individual an opportunity to dialogue and share information which leads to the emergence of new knowledge and understanding.

The Behaviorist Paradigm

According to the work of Skinner (1971), the ultimate goal of education is to convey the concept that behavior will ensure survival of the human species, societies, and individuals. Behaviorism has been considered one of the foundational models for the largest segment of adult education, mainly job and skills training. The behaviorist paradigm is prevalent in occupational and professional programs. Srinivasan (1977) had noted the following characteristics in reference to the behaviorist paradigm:

1. Objectives must be clearly stated in specific and measurable behavior terms.
2. The learning tasks must be analytically designed in relation to desired end behaviors.
3. Content must be broken into small steps that are easy to master. These steps must be designed to encourage self-instruction and require an overt response by the learner (for example, filling in the blanks or selecting a response from multiple options).

4. The materials should provide a means for immediate feedback so that the adult learner will know if his (her) response was correct and so that he (she) can be aware of the pace of his (her) progress.
5. The subject matter and activities must adhere to a set sequence and process conducive to mastery.
6. The successful completion of each step and the choice of steps must provide its own reward or incentive.
7. The responsibility for ensuring that learning takes place must rest with the materials themselves as learning instruments and not with any instructor, leader, or helper (p. 12).

It is the role of the facilitator to develop an environment that evokes the appropriate behavior to meet specific goals and objectives. These instructional designs which include programmed instruction, computer-assisted instruction, and competency-based education, are types of programs that are grounded in behaviorism (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). According to Cross (1981), the behavioral paradigm works well with adult vocational education and skills training. The application of the behaviorist paradigm has been observed in many sectors of adult education, such as the armed forces, nursing and health education, and training within business and industry (Merriam & Cunningham, 1988).

The Humanistic Paradigm

The humanistic paradigm is founded on the work of humanistic psychologists, Allport, 1955; Rogers (1961); Maslow, (1968), and the work of Malcolm Knowles (1984), comprises several assumptions regarding teaching and learning that has influenced the field of adult education. Rogers' (1961) principles of significant learning and Maslow's (1968) views have been interwoven into much of adult learning theory.

Knowles' theory (1970, 1975, 1980, 1984) on andragogy and much of the research and writing on self-directed learning are grounded in the humanistic paradigm of adult education. This perspective of facilitation has the potential for designing a true learning environment since "there is a natural tendency for people to learn and that learning will flourish if nourishing, encouraging environments are provided" (Cross, 1981, p. 228). From a learning theory perspective, the humanistic paradigm focuses on the student's perception that is centered on experience and the appreciation of freedom and responsibility that accompanies the confidence derived from establishing a sense of self-empowerment.

This particular view of adult education is rooted in the concept of partnership, where the instructor and student work together in a dichotomous relationship to meet stated goals and objectives, rather than an authoritarian transmission of knowledge from the depositor to the ignorant, empty receptacle (Freire, 1970). It is the responsibility of the facilitator to assist learners in their quest for self-actualization by helping adults to realize their deeply felt needs.

Merriam & Cunningham (1989) warns facilitators that there is an inherent danger in this paradigm, as it causes a tendency to think that "educational encounters should resemble a trouble-free voyage along a smoothly flowing river of increasing self-actualizing, with no whirlpools or eddies of conflict, self-doubt, anxiety, or challenges" (p. 204).

There were two critical assumptions embedded within this paradigm by Merriam & Cunningham (1989) and Merriam & Caffarella (1991). The first problem or contradiction revealed around the issue of interpretation of a good facilitator is one who

pleases the learners by meeting their declared needs in the manner requested by the learners. The second is that learners are always the best judges of their own interests. One problem with these two assumptions is that the role of the educational facilitator could be reduced to a customer- service manager whose job is determined by the desires of the learners. In this situation, the facilitators would have to quell their ideas and insights so that they could meet the learners' declared wants. A good facilitator, from this perspective, is one who only tries to please learners (Cross, 1981; Brookfield, 1987; Merriam & Cunningham, 1989; Galbraith, 1991; and Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

This, then, becomes an unacceptable outcome for the role of facilitators--that of making it easier for adult learners. This type of "good" facilitator helps the learner to remain within their own narrow range of perceptions and interpretations. According to Meyers (1986) and Brookfield (1987), it is an important task of the facilitator to provide an environment that encourages adult learners to explore alternatives to their present ways of thinking and acting.

The Critical Paradigm

The last facilitation paradigm is the critical model which uses the work of Freire as a framework for adult education. The major focus of this facilitation model is to encourage adult learners to become critical evaluators of the values, beliefs, and ideologies that they have uncritically assimilated from the dominant culture (Heaney, 1981; Mezirow, 1983; Shor, 1987). Facilitators using this critical view stress the need to understand that social and politically-held values and beliefs are contextually created, and these values and beliefs serve the interests of the dominant group within society (Daloiz, 1986; Shor & Freire, 1987). Facilitators use dialogue between themselves and

adult learners as they converse about experiences, expectations, perspectives, and values. During this process, the facilitator challenges adult learners to interpret their experiences in different ways. The facilitator's job is to help adult learners become critical thinkers who can engage themselves in the process of inventing and reinventing their occupational, personal, social and political worlds (Freire, 1971; Mezirow, 1981; Merriam & Cunningham, 1989).

There have been several critiques of this critical paradigm, and two distinct problems were found. First, those under oppression are generally not aware of their condition and blame themselves for their plight. They are not yet capable of connecting their personal troubles to larger social forces and structures. Making this connection is a major objective for those practitioners of adult education (Brookfield, 1986, 1987). Secondly, there is an unrecognizable bias that is emphasized within this paradigm, that of adult students as inherently critical thinkers and who possess a higher critical awareness. Those facilitators who utilize this paradigm take a self-evident view that learners who are critically aware learners tend to align themselves with leftist political values. In essence, those adult learners who become aware of their oppressive reality will commit themselves to social movements that will challenge and try to change the hegemonic ideology of the status quo. This is one possible scenario, but according to Merriam & Cunningham, (1989), it is not inevitable. Adult learners may perceive how the dominant ideology is used to maintain inequality, and:

Further, the adult learners can also perceive how power relationships operate to maintain this inequality and decide to join the oppressive class, or he (she) may simply refuse to acknowledge the truth of this reality and identify those engaged in promoting this interpretation as unpatriotic subversives (Merriam & Cunningham, 1989, p. 206).

In sum, adult learners can be locked within a sense of false consciousness and not be able to understand the reality of their own social positions; therefore, they are not able to work towards social change.

Feminist Pedagogy

*Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity.
Hence it is prophetic (and, as such, hopeful). Hence,
it affirms women and men as beings that transcend them-
selves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom
immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the
past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what
and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future.*

Paulo Freire (1970)

Feminist pedagogy, as it has developed in the United States provides, a historical example of critical pedagogy in practice. One of the intellectual roots of feminist pedagogy lies in the life-long work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. His work emerged from a vision of education as the means to uncover and challenge structures within the educational system that work to maintain the class boundaries that oppress and repress certain groups of people (hooks, 1994; Holland, Blair & Sheldon, 1995).

According to bell hooks (1994), who is committed to feminist pedagogy, the experiences of both feminist pedagogy and Freirean pedagogy converge as they both provide a critical view of traditional educational practices. Both feminist pedagogy and Freirean pedagogy rest on visions of social transformation, which lies beneath the common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness, and historical change. These two pedagogical ideologies affirm the existence of oppressions in people's material conditions of existence and as a part of consciousness. Both of these ideologies

rest on a view of consciousness as more than a sum of dominating discourses. They contain within them a critical capacity for what Antonio Gramsci (1971) called “good sense.” Both perspectives see human beings as subjects and actors in history, each holding a strong commitment to justice, a vision of a better world, and the potential for liberation (Freire, 1971; Shore & Freire, 1997; Orner, 1992).

In his classic text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1971), Freire presents the epistemological basis for his pedagogy and discusses the concepts of oppression conscientization, that is, coming to a consciousness of oppression and a commitment to end that oppression. Freire’s epistemology also focuses on the concepts of dialogue (feminist use the concept of voice) and liberation, along with oppression. Conscientization, oppression, dialogue, and liberation are at the heart of Freire’s pedagogical project (Middleton, 1993; Holland, Blair & Sheldon, 1995). Basic to the Freirean method of conscientization is the belief in the ability of all people to be knowers and to read both the word and the world. In Freirean pedagogy, it is through the interrogation of their own experiences that the oppressed will come to an understanding of their own power as knowers and creators of the world, this knowledge will contribute to the transformation of their world (Freire, 1971; Luke & Gore, 1992; hooks, 1993).

Like Freirean pedagogy, feminist pedagogy is based on the assumptions of the power of raising others’ consciousness, the existence of oppression and the possibility of ending it, and the desire for social transformation. But in its historical development, feminist pedagogy has revealed the shortcomings that emerge in the attempt to enact a pedagogy that assumes universal experiences and abstract goals. Also, feminist pedagogy, like Freirean pedagogy, is grounded in a vision of social change. And, like

Freirean pedagogy, feminist pedagogy rests on truth claims of the primacy of experience and consciousness that are grounded in historically situated social change movements. Key to understanding the methods and epistemological claims of feminist pedagogy is an understanding of its origins in more grassroots political activity, particularly the consciousness-raising groups of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.

One of the principles of feminist education and pedagogy is based on the Freirean concept of liberation, although feminist theorists expanded and enriched Freire's model. Feminist pedagogy embraces the critical and activist proponents of the Freirean model of education. They expanded on his vision by considering not only the class and race aspects of knowledge production and dissemination, but also the gender aspects as well as the intersections of these categories in people's lives. Feminist epistemology want students to do more than just master knowledge discourse and converse about the process of knowledge production, but to focus on social change. Students need to be situated in an environment that allows them to critique the unequal social relations that undergird the dominant social order and to ask why these circumstances exist and to ask what can be done about them. In order for liberatory goals to be met and realized, feminist educators must develop a classroom structure that is explicitly designed to empower students to apply their learning to social action and transformation. This type of process will help students to recognize their ability to act and create a more humane social order and become effective voices of change within the larger social world (Romney, Tatum & Jones, 1992; Schniedewind, 1993; hooks, 1994; Mayberry, 1999).

According to a study conducted by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule (1986, 1997), *Women's Ways of Knowing*, focused on how women returning to higher education learn within the educational environment. They identified three perspectives on how women learn. The first deals with the concept of voice, where women have the opportunity to articulate their own sense of self. The second perspective is connected knowing and how it influences both the way the individual reasons and what she experiences as important in her learning environment. The third perspective is that of the student's developmental position which influences how she learns and understands what knowledge is, how she relates to teachers and peers and how she experiences her purposes in becoming educated. Regardless of her particular history, each re-entry female student needs to develop a sense of her own power as a student, and as a knower and acquire an understanding of and control over her learning and know how to set realistic and articulated goals for what she wants to learn. According to Belenky and others, these three perspectives can help those who educate nontraditional female students to explore how they make meaning of the learning process. And, as these nontraditional students gain a voice, they in turn gain confidence in themselves as knowers with the capacity to articulate and discuss ideas.

Belenky and colleagues (1986, 1997) conducted in-depth interviews of 135 women, "based on the theoretical and empirical work of Perry, Kohlberg, & Gilligan" (p. 14), which grouped women's perspectives of knowing into five major categories:

1. Silence – a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless subjects to the whims of external authority. They are passive, feel incompetent, and are defined by others.

2. Received knowledge – a perspective from which women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own. They listen to the voices of others; their world is literal and concrete, good or bad.
3. Subjective knowledge – a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited. The focus of truth shifts to the self; intuition is valued over logic and abstraction; here women begin to gain a voice. Half the women in the study were in this category.
4. Procedural knowledge – a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge. This position takes two forms: separate knowing--the self is separate from the objects of discourse, making it possible to doubt and reason,--and connected knowing--there is intimacy and equality between the self and the object of discourse, based on empathetic understanding.
5. Constructed knowledge – a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge and value both subjective and objective strategies for learning. This stage is characterized by the development of an authentic voice. (Belenky & Colleagues 1986, p. 15).

Theorists of feminist pedagogy have envisioned students acquiring a voice, “...valuing women’s experiences inside the classroom, and the disruption of power hierarchies which have kept women silent” (Culley, 1985, p. 213). Critical theorists of pedagogy:

argue that the language of schooling and everyday life has to provide teachers and students with the skills they will need to locate themselves in history, find their own voice, and establish the convictions and compassion necessary for exercising civic courage, taking risks, and furthering the habits, customs and social relations essential to democratic public forms (Freire & Giroux, 1989, p. viii).

This concept of critical reflection of feminist pedagogy is tied to the theoretical concerns of feminist theory which works to uncover, understand, and transform gender,

race, and class oppression and domination. Feminist pedagogy is committed to the development of critical consciousness empowering students to apply learning to social action and social transformation.

In her book Teaching to Transgress, bell hooks (1994) presents the educator with the possibility that education truly can be fun as well as exciting when we engage students and value their presence. With this type of engaged pedagogy, everyone--teacher and students--can make an impact on the classroom dynamics by recognizing that the teacher, as well as the students, have something to contribute to the teaching/learning process. "Seeing the classroom as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective in creating and sustaining a learning community" (pg. 8). In this communal classroom, everyone's "voice" and everyone's experiences can be used as a way to create knowledge, thus, transgressing boundaries that would go beyond rote memorization and assist students in critical reflection about themselves and the world. I believe that this type of learning can benefit women as they begin to make connections with their own lives, if they are able to become more engaged in their teaching/learning process.

There have been numerous proponents of feminist and critical pedagogical thought and practices, and these critical epistemologies have been critiqued. These arguments are concerned about the validity or the possibility of such critical pedagogical praxis. One school of criticism argues that the assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices fundamental to the literature on critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy that advocate empowerment dialogue, student voice, and even the term "critical" are mere myths. Myths that tend to only perpetuate relations of domination (Ellsworth, 1992; Middleton, 1993; Welch, 1994; Kramer-Dahl, 1996). According to Ellsworth:

...when participants in our class attempted to put into practice prescriptions offered in the literature concerning empowerment, dialogue and student voice, we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against, including Eurocentrism, racism, sexism, classism, and “banking education” (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 91).

Ellsworth (1992) goes on to say that this ideal of “critical” or “feminist” pedagogues leads to reproductive relations of domination in classrooms, and repress students instead of liberating them from the status quo.

Within the field of feminist and critical pedagogy, a central question has arisen, “What diversity do we silence, in the name of “liberatory” pedagogy?” (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 91). In a call for “critical” reflection and interrogation, other central questions arise as well, mainly how is such a critical investigation possible, if only marginal voices and texts are authorized in the context of the classroom? Luke, Freebody, & Gilbert (1991) have argued that without reading these voices and texts against the more dominant, canonical ones, how can the various reading positions and practices be made apparent to students? Considering all of these issues carefully, it becomes obvious that feminist and critical pedagogues and its teachers often overestimate their transformative powers, thus, making the liberatory classroom an accomplice in the creation of a false metaphysics (Ellsworth, 1992; Luke & Gore, 1992; Luke, 1996).

Experience is understood as a transparent window on reality to enable students to understand experience in such non-essentialist terms is difficult, and even more so if one’s classroom effectively separates minority students and texts from dominant Anglo-American ones (Ellsworth, 1992). This type of feminist and critical pedagogy can create classroom situations which Fuss (1989) described as “one downed” each other on the oppressive scale. The minority and female students view themselves in this situation as

the ones with superior inside-knowledge of more authentically experienced oppressions, relegating the white students to marginal observer status, with no legitimate contributions of their own to offer (Luke, 1994). With the female and minority students all of a sudden reconstructed as the more privileged and dominant, many have discovered that there is also the recognition that this moving to the center is located in a different and separate space from the centrality white students usually occupied. Mohanty (1990, p. 195) has characterized the affect of this oppositional arrangement in the liberatory classroom:

Potentially this implicitly binary construction [female versus male; minority students versus white students] undermines the understanding of the complication that students must take seriously in order to understand “difference” as historical and relational. Co-implication refers to the idea that all of us . . . share certain histories as well as certain responsibilities: ideologies of race define both white and black peoples, just as gender ideologies define both women and men. Thus, while “experience” is an enabling focus in the classroom, unless it is explicitly understood as historical, contingent, and the result of interpretation, it can coagulate into frozen, binary, psychologistic positions.

Mohanty is telling us to be conscious of the “liberatory” classroom because it would cause further separation between minority students and white students, and it can also differentiate minority students from each other.

The Issue of Race

Because racism, sexism, and elitism are continually reflected and reinforced in the system of higher education, many Black women (and women of color) feel isolated and alienated. They feel that they are largely ignored, misunderstood, and unable to identify with other students, staff, and professors. Consequently, their experiences are not merely influenced by gender issues, but racism and classism play an important role as well.

Within institutions of higher education, there is a feeling of isolation and alienation which Black women (and other women of color) experience. They feel that

they are largely ignored, misunderstood, and they are unable to identify with other students, staff, and professors. Consequently, their experiences are distinctive because they represent multiple forms of oppression rather than simply sexual oppression.

Feminist scholars refer to these multiple forms of oppression as “triple jeopardy.” The concept of triple jeopardy is merely one form of discrimination constructed on another form of discrimination, thus, making the educational experiences of Black women very complex and conflictual. Many Black women experience the dynamics of triple jeopardy--racism, sexism, and classism—simultaneously and not as independent processes standing alone, but in relation to each other (Smith & Steward, 1983; King, 1990, and others). Henry (1994) said that: “consequently, racial and sexual discrimination (and sometimes classism) are inseparable issues for Black women in higher education, whether they are members of staff and/or the student body, or the subject of analysis” (p. 45).

Ellsworth, (1992) in her article, “Why Doesn’t This Feel Empowering,” found it difficult for women of color to prioritize their expressions of racial privilege and oppression when such prioritizing threatens the perpetuation of their gender oppression. International students, Black or White, found it difficult to blend their voices with students of color from the United States when it meant subordination of their oppressions as people living under U.S. policies and for whom English was a second language (p. 104). She also found that it was difficult for Asian American women to join their voices with other women of color because they wanted to keep their issues at the forefront as Asian Americans. Also, within the academy, many women of color are asked to speak

for their race/ethnicity, as if they know about all individuals within their specific group and their views.

The literature makes several assumptions about the silence of women within the academy; it refers to such terms as “lost voice,” “voicelessness,” or a lack of social identity in reference to gender, race, and class biases. It is worth quoting bell hooks at length about the myth of the silence of subordinated groups:

Within feminist circles silence is often seen as the sexist defined “right speech of womanhood” – the sign of women’s submission to patriarchal authority. This emphasis on women’s silence may be an accurate remembering of what has taken place in the households of women from WASP backgrounds in the United States but in Black communities (and in other diverse ethnic communities) women have not been silent. Their voices can be heard. Certainly for Black women our struggle has not been to emerge from silence to speech but to change the nature and directions of our speech. To make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard . . . Dialogue, the sharing of speech and recognition, took place not between mother and child or mother and male authority figure, but with other Black women. I can remember watching, fascinated, as our mother talked with her mother, sisters, and women friends. The intimacy and intensity of their speech-the satisfaction they received from talking to one another, the pleasure, the joy. It was in this world of woman speech, loud talk, angry words, women with tongues sharp, tender sweet tongues, touching our world with their words, that I made speech my birthright-and the right to voice, to authorship, a privilege I would not be denied. It was in that world and because of it that I came to dream of writing, to write (1989, p. 124).

Women and men of color, white women, individuals that are impoverished, disabled, and those who are gay and lesbians are not silenced the way it is portrayed in the literature on critical pedagogy. “They are not talking in their authentic voices, or they are declining/refusing to talk at all to critical educators who have been unable to acknowledge the presence of knowledge that are challenging and most likely inaccessible to their own social positions” (Ellsworth, 1994, p. 104).

The literature on critical pedagogy and some of the feminist pedagogical writings have failed to comprehend the issues of trust, risk, and the operations of fear around the

issues of identity and politics in the classroom. Thus, feminist trained practitioners will continue to fail to loosen the deep-seated, self-interested investments in unjust relations of, for example, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Ellsworth, 1994).

The Chilly Climate for Women

The Project on the Status and Education of Women of the Association of American Colleges compiled the results from several studies and produced two volumes entitled: *The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One For Women* by Sandler & Hall (1982); and *Sexism in the Classroom From Grade School to Graduate School* by Sadker & Sadker (1986). This project's results revealed in extraordinary detail the numerous ways that the classroom environment within various educational levels has diminished the development of a sense of self in girls and women. All teachers are by no means guilty of the demeaning behavior or treatment that this report describes; however, it is widespread and pervasive.

The report showed that even those faculty and administrators who are concerned about equity inadvertently treat women in subtle ways that are different from that of men. And in many instances they are not aware of these occurrences. In fact, the lack of awareness is what makes the behavior and its impact so insidious. For example, instructors, both men and women, call on male students more frequently than females. By giving more attention to male students in the classroom, a climate is unintentionally created that can interfere with the development of women's self-confidence and academic participation (Sandler & Hall, 1982; Sadker & Sadker, 1986). These behaviors may be small and are even considered "trivial," but when trivial instances continue to happen

again and again, they can express underlying expectations and a certain discomfort in interacting with women.

According to Sandler & Hall (1982), in many instances when a female is the first of her sex or race to go to college, three consequences tend to apply to women. One, the person is placed under a microscope and everyone is focusing on that individual. They are concerned about the person's behavior and/or attitude within the academic setting. Two, as a woman and/or person of color, the individual is not allowed any margin of error. And three, the person is always made to feel as though her achievements are not based on merit, but on her gender and/or race.

Also, since women are considered as outsiders, this type of pressure alone is enormous, especially when a woman is the only woman in a given situation. Therefore, she would be called upon to be the "woman." In other words she would speak from the woman's perspective, as if she knew all women and their points of view. Women of color are in double jeopardy (and at times triple jeopardy), for they experience adverse treatment because of their race, gender, and/or class. Faculty, administrators, staff, and even students may interpret the student's behavior in light of racial stereotypes; for example, the silence of Black women could be interpreted as "sullenness," or for Hispanic women as "passivity" (Bartky, 1996). Black women have reported that they are either considered academically incompetent or academically brilliant "exceptions." Or, women of color are singled out in ways that underscores their belongingness, by being asked to speak on issues relating to their race/ethnic points of view, rather than their own personal points of view.

College instructors are more inclined to be mentors for men rather than women; they are also more likely to select a man for teaching and research assistantships. Also, women's participation within academe is often looked upon as not being serious. These observations are becoming more noticeable, and many female students are able to detect overt sexism within the classroom (Sandler & Hall, 1982; Sadker & Sadker, 1986, Bartky, 1996).

The research results of the studies mentioned also emphasized how this intense environment can leave many female students with feelings of self-doubt and concerns about their abilities. For example, nontraditional female students may experience low self-esteem in comparison with male students. Females may also have less confidence in their judgments and interactions with faculty and other students than their male counterparts (Mitchell & Starr, 1971; Sandler & Hall, 1982).

Sadker & Sadker (1986) outlined four specific conclusions of their study on the "chilly climate" for women. They noted that:

1. Instructors are unaware of the presence or the impact of this type of bias.
2. Male students are given more attention from teachers and are given more time to talk in the classroom.
3. Training can reduce or eliminate sex bias from classroom instruction.
4. Equity in classroom interaction can increase the effectiveness of instructors. Equity and effectiveness are not competing concerns; they are complimentary (p. 512).

Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) discussed the institutional climate for women and minorities. Their study pointed out that evidence suggested that women's colleges tend to enhance the educational attainment for women. Also, the evidence supports the claim

that a woman's college provides a uniquely supportive climate for women (both students/faculty) in a wide range of intellectual and social leadership roles.

Also, a woman's college provides women with a sense of belongingness where they do not feel isolated and alienated from their academic pursuits. They also cited similar results about historically Black colleges. They found evidence to support the claim that Black students who attend predominantly white colleges and universities experience "social isolation, alienation, personal dissatisfaction, and overt racism more than their Black counterparts at historically Black institutions" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, pp. 383-384). Also, they found that those Black students who attended historically Black colleges were less likely to drop out of college. Therefore, the chilly institutional environment became a barrier to their academic success when attending co-educational institutional and predominately white institutions. Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) also, discussed how this chilly environment for women and minority students produces a powerful need for them to band together for psychological and social support for one another. This defense mechanism has proven to be a tacit defense against hostility, especially that from white faculty, students, and staff.

Townsend, Guyden, Hutcheson, Laden, Pavel, and Wolf-Wendel in their article "Beyond a Distinctive Student Body: Possibilities for Practice," discussed the impact of the historical legacy of colleges and universities and how these impact women and minorities. They believed that an institution's climate consists of four dimensions:

- (1) An institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of various social/ethnic groups (gender), (2) its structural diversity in terms of numerical representations of various racial/ethnic (gender) groups, (3) the psychological climate of perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and (4) and the behavioral climate dimension, characterized by inter-group relations on campus (p. 232).

These inclusions refer to colleges and universities that historically were created to educate women and/or minorities. In contrast, predominantly white colleges and universities have a legacy of overt exclusion for women and minorities.

Barriers Confronting Nontraditional Students

Several researchers have conducted studies on the barriers to adult learning. The majority of these studies asked people directly through interviews or questionnaires to identify barriers to learning. One study focused on what people do rather than what they say. If, for example, researchers want to know how important cost is as a barrier, they might observe the impact of raising or lowering fees or of negotiating educational benefits into union contracts for workers. Another set of studies used hypotheses about barriers and tested them through experimental design. For example, researchers advanced the hypothesis that unpleasant early school experiences are a major deterrent to adult participation in learning activities. An experimental design to test the hypothesis involved devising a measure of “unpleasant school experience” and a measure of “adult participation” and determining the relationship between the two learning activities (Cross, 1981; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

According to Cross (1981), many nontraditional students cited cost as one barrier in reference to tuition, books, transportation, and lost time from work. Cross (1974, 1981); Knows (1980), Merriam & Caffarell (1991) found that many nontraditional female students experienced time as a barrier when trying to balance home and work responsibilities. Corss & Zusman (1977) and Cross (1979, 1981) classified barriers

affecting nontraditional students into three distinct categories--situational, institutional and dispositional barriers.

Situational Barriers

Situational barriers are those arising from one's situation in life at any given time. Lack of time due to job and home responsibilities, for example, deters large numbers of potential learners in the 25 to 45 year-old age groups. Lack of money is a problem for young people and those from low-income backgrounds. Lack of child care is a major problem for young parents, and transportation can cause situational barriers for geographically isolated and physically handicapped learners. (Cross & Zusman 1979; Cross 1981; Merriam & Caffarella 1991).

In a number of research studies, situational barriers were more often than not at the top of the list. Ten percent listed situational factors such as child care or transportation; about 50 percent mentioned cost or lack of time as a major drawback to educational participation. By a substantial margin, time and cost of an education was the leading situational barrier. Ironically, individuals who have the time for learning, lack the finances. Those individuals who are from middle and upper-class families were less likely to mention cost, in comparison to those individuals from low income backgrounds (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965). According to Cross (1981) public funding supports about one-third of Black learners, and employers are providing educational costs for one-third of white males, leaving White females to be supported by their families or themselves (Boaz, 1978, p. 73). In most of the studies on situational barriers, women were more likely to cite cost as a major barrier.

Lack of time to pursue educational attainment is mentioned more often for individuals in their 30s and 40s than younger or older nontraditional students. Those individuals who are highly educated within the higher income bracket are less likely to be concerned with time than those who are poorly educated and with lower incomes (Cross & Zusman, 1979). Other barriers consist of child care and lack of transportation. Lack of child care and lack of funds to pay for child care provided problems for women between the ages of 18 and 40 years of age (Cross, 1981). Cross (1981) also found that transportation is a major problem for the elderly and those from low-income backgrounds but rarely a problem for the middle-class and/or middle aged nontraditional students.

Silling (1984) found that the lack of money was a major barrier for part-time nontraditional students. She found that part-time students were less likely to qualify for any type of financial aid. Also, this study showed that even when adults attend full time, their family income exceeds the eligibility requirements for any type of educational grants (Cross, 1981; Griffin, 1983; Hu, 1985). Roehl & Okun (1984) found that traditional aged women enrolled in educational programs experienced positive support in their friendship relationships. Yet, for returning nontraditional women, support from significant others--spouses, children, relatives, employers, teachers, and coworkers--tend to make both a positive and negative impact to their academic success.

Lewis (1988), in her study on re-entry women, found that personal support was a major barrier for women. She found that a partner's attitude toward women's return is a crucial factor in her educational success and satisfaction. While some women listed a high degree of support and enthusiasm from their significant others, many encounter

passive nonsupport, resistance, and even open hostility in response to their educational aspirations.

Valentine & others (1987) conducted a study on the attitudes and behavior of spouses of women who attended public and private institutions of higher education to determine how administrators could better understand what support is needed at home in order to improve educational opportunities for women. Researchers found that support differed in reference to the nature and amount of support, depending of the distinct types of women and their experience. "They ranged from women who received emotional and logistical support to those who experienced subtle and overt forms of sabotage" (Lewis, 1988, p. 99). Lewis also found that Black and Hispanic students reported the largest number of counter supports; single, widowed, separated, and divorced students had significantly less positive supports than married student did.

Leonard (1994), in her study on mature returning women, found that these students faced hostility and a lack of support from their partners. These partners disapproved of their participation because it appeared to threaten gender roles. She found that married men feared that their relationships would be compromised and could cause the couple to grow apart. Family members were found to question time spent away from home and the challenge of traditional parental roles, as studying and class attendance are balanced against home responsibilities. Pahl (1989) found that husbands were less generous in helping their wives with educational expenses by using money to uphold the source of power and male dominance in the family. These men felt, because they were the wage earners, their wives were responsible for providing domestic and child-care

services for the household. (For this research study, I will be paying close attention to personal support as well as issues surrounding child care and tuition cost.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers consist of all those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities. These barriers can be categorized into five distinct areas: inconvenient schedules and problems with locations or transportation; full-time fees for part-time study; inappropriate courses of study; procedural problems and time requirements; and lack of information about programs and procedures. Adult students who are older than their instructors can also create barriers. Some instructors are intimidated and feel uncomfortable interacting with older students. Nontraditional students of color and women also experience the “chilly” institutional environment that was discussed in the “chilly climate” section of this chapter.

Institutional barriers, according to Cross (1981), are those barriers that are erected by organizations and can impede the learning opportunities for nontraditional students. Cross (1981) found in her study that institutional barriers affected between 10% and 25% of potential learners.

Some institutions take pride in adopting gate-keeper roles (Walker, 1975; Woodley, 1984; Bourner & Hamed, 1987; Smithers & Robinson, (1989). Many institutions rate their status in terms of how many applicants they turn away, rather than on the number they are able to admit (Woodrow, 1988). Further, Woodrow suggests that admissions, personnel, and academic staff make difficult decisions in regards to student intake and rely on “A” grade level. This in turn transforms into an unwillingness on the

part of the institution to adopt flexible policies to enhance the access of nontraditional students. According to Harrison (1990), nontraditional students require different forms of interaction with instructors, tutors, counselors, and socio-psychological support than those of their traditional counterparts.

Dispositional Barriers

Dispositional barriers are those related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner. Many adults, for example, feel that they are too old to learn. Adults with poor educational backgrounds frequently lack interest in learning or self-confidence in their ability to learn. This is where I found myself. Because of my average educational background, I felt as though I was too “dumb” to be successful pursuing my dreams of a college degree. Also, I felt that my age was a hindrance to learning accompanied by a lack of self-confidence and feelings of guilt for neglecting family responsibilities. Many of these types of barriers are self-imposed psychologically.

Wilcox, Saltford & Veres (1975) conducted one of the most interesting research studies on barriers and found that the leading barrier (26 percent) was lack of interest, and fewer than 2 percent were willing to admit that lack of interest deterred their own participation. Community leaders who were asked to participate in this study believed that individuals in their community would perceive dispositional barriers as the most important barrier to their educational participation.

In 1987, Glass & Rose also conducted a study on women returning to institutions of higher education. They found that women felt inadequate about their educational abilities and were afraid to compete with younger college students. Cramer (1981) and White (1983) in their study found that women who had been away from academe for a

number of years felt significant levels of strain and apprehension for returning to the world of books, assignments, and tests. Howell & Schwartz (1988) in their study of poor women, found that these re-entry women felt degraded because they were dependent on public assistance, and this was contributing to their low self-esteem, attendance in class and their feelings of self-doubt as well as their lack of comfort in interacting with other students.

Focus Groups

There are numerous definitions of focus groups in the literature--Powell et al (1996) considers them to be collective activities; Gross & Leinbach (1996) refer to focus groups as social events; Kitzinger (1995) identifies the contribution that focus groups make to social research; and Kitzinger (1994) considers focus groups to have features like organized discussions. For this research study, I will be using the definitions of Powell (1996) "a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research" (p. 499) and the definition set forth by Morgan (1997), "interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher" (p.12).

Based on the literature, there are some advantages and disadvantages for using focus groups in social science research. I will briefly summarize the benefits and limitations for using focus groups.

Advantages

Focus groups provide researchers with an open format where participants can dialogue about their shared experiences, which allows for large and rich amounts of data

in the words of the participants. The data collected can furnish richer meaning, making connections that can be important to the overall study, and identify subtle variations in expression and meaning. These multiple understandings and meanings are revealed by participants. These multiple explanations of their behavior and attitudes are allowed to readily form due to group interaction. According to Kitzinger (1994, 1995), referent interaction is a crucial feature of the focus group, as it allows participants to ask questions of each other and re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences.

Race, Hotch & Parker (1994) and Goss & Leinbach (1996) believe that focus groups add a valuable dimension to social science research because it gives participants an opportunity to work collaboratively with researchers, and this can be empowering for those participating in qualitative research studies. Also, it can produce data and ideas that may not emerge during individual interviews.

Disadvantages

Although there are many advantages for using focus groups for social science research, there are also some limitations. Focus groups can discourage individuals for sharing their experiences due to lack of confidence, or the inability to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Morgan (1988) states that a limitation can arise if researchers lose control over the group and let some participants monopolize the discussion.

Morgan (1993) discusses two major disadvantages for using focus groups. Because of the open-ended nature of focus groups, it is difficult to summarize and interpret results. Also, the facilitator of the focus group may bias the results by unknowingly giving cues as to the types of responses and answers they are looking for in

the research study. Although there are important advantages for using focus groups to enrich qualitative studies, it can also provide limitations that can bias the overall study.

Conclusion of Literature Review

Within this literature review, various positions were cited in reference to pedagogy versus andragogy. However, these arguments regarding andragogy as a adult educational theory have been questionable, as discussed by Houle (1972), McKenzie (1977), Cross (1981), Pratt (1984), Hartee (1984), Davenport (1987) and others. Yet, these arguments all center around theoretical prescriptions or approaches instead of empirical research results. In this study, the researcher's contribution to this ongoing debate will test the accuracy of some of the theoretical/philosophical arguments.

Some scholars say that andragogy is a better framework to use when educating adults, yet others say there is no difference between adults and children as they basically learn in the same manner. It appears from these critical debates, few have gone directly to adult learners and asked them about their preferred learning environments. Therefore, the major purpose of this project is to empirically study the preferred learning environments of nontraditional undergraduate female students. This will be accomplished by utilizing the case study method and conducting in-depth interviews to thoroughly examine the experiences of nontraditional undergraduate female students. Respondents will be asked to identify their preferred learning environments, why they returned to institutions of higher education, and what barriers--situational, institutional and/or dispositional--have hindered their academic success.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The rationale for the proposed study is to create an in-depth analysis using critical qualitative methods to capture the “richness” or what Geertz (1973) calls “thick description” of the nontraditional female undergraduate student population. More precisely, the study will attempt to provide a better understanding of this particular nontraditional population by allowing a limited number of Black and White females to tell their own stories and share their voices regarding the extent to which certain salient factors influenced, or continue to influence, their student status.

The main question informing this study is: “Do nontraditional female students who attend a community college perceive differences in their educational experiences when compared to nontraditional female students who attend a private four-year college?” In answering this question, I will look at the role that the following factors play in the lives of twenty nontraditional college women: race, gender, socio-economic background, secondary school background, personal motivational factors, self-identity, mentoring, family support, and religious factors. The institutional environment will be assessed by having the students share their experiences regarding professorial teaching style: pedagogy versus andragogy, the learning climate, and perceived barriers. I will also explore issues related to these students sense of being integrated into the life and culture of their respective campuses.

Accordingly, an understanding of how nontraditional female undergraduate students perceive and relate to their learning experience in traditional college settings is

the primary goal of this study. For this research project, two different colleges were selected. One college is a two-year public community college (4000 student population) located in a small midwestern city and the other site is a four-year private college (3000 student population) located in a midwestern city. Though located in the midwest, the two institutions are situated in the same state but different cities.

The reason the researcher selected these two institutions was four-fold. First, each institution was accessible to the researcher who is a full-time faculty member at the two-year community college; thus, she had developed a positive relationship with faculty members and many nontraditional female students. Secondly, the researcher had developed positive relationships with a sociology professor and the Director of Adult Recruitment at the private four-year college. These relationships were crucial for the successful completion of this research project (obtaining participants for the study). Thirdly, the researcher wanted to examine if there was a significant difference in the educational experiences of nontraditional female students attending a two-year public community college versus their counterparts at a four-year private college. And lastly, did the difference in the institutions make an impact on their age, race, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds? Therefore, I intend to capture their experiences within a context that “reflects human interests and values” (Slattery, 1995, p. x); in this case, the nontraditional female undergraduate voices.

Qualitative research allows participants an opportunity to use their voices and express their experiences in an open format. According to Patton (1990), positivism through quantitative methods relies on pre-identified variables from the general population and tries to fit the experiences of individuals within “predetermined response

categories” (Patton, 1990, pg. 14), thus allowing participants to assist in defining the research and its directions. If the researcher had selected the quantitative method to conduct this particular research study, she would have lost the individuality of diversified life experiences of nontraditional undergraduate women. According to feminist researchers, this constraint would not capture the rich experiences and voices of women in this study. By addressing the essence and context of the lived experiences regarding Black/White identity and female identity, (and to understand and appreciate their individualized experiences and voices), an approach more consistent with the ideas of feminism was desirable.

In this research study the reader will hear the narrative voices of nontraditional women students speak through taped interviews and focus group discussions. Through a focus, which C. Wright Mills (1959) has termed “biography, history, and social structure.” I will examine and explore the relationship between the individual female student’s educational experiences and the wider power relations (age, gender, race, class) and how that shapes and constrains their educational possibilities. It will be through their stories that these Black and White nontraditional female students will make themselves known to others. Stivers (1993) argues that the self:

...is an essentially narrative phenomenon: people conceive of themselves in terms of stories about their actions in the world, using them to make sense of the temporal flow of their lives. We find identity and meaning as a result of the stories we tell about ourselves or that others tell about us. Therefore, a narrative approach to self-understanding is not a distortion of reality but a confirmation of it. (pp. 412).

In studying the lives of women, I am able to further understand myself. Dorothy Smith (1990) expressed “as thinking heads--as social scientists--we are always inside what we are thinking about, we know it in the first place as insiders” (p. 51). As a

nontraditional female student who's on the inside, I have always been curious of the experiences of nontraditional women. I wanted to understand if my experiences in higher education were unique to me as a Black woman, or did other nontraditional women from diverse backgrounds (race, age and class) have similar experiences. These thoughts and feelings were the driving forces behind this research study.

Population and Sample

The population sample is nontraditional female undergraduate students at two institutions of higher education. Nonprobability sampling methods were utilized in this research project. The researcher employed three nonprobability sampling methods: quota sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. The value of a quota samples is that quotas are set to ensure that the sample represents certain characteristics in proportion to their prevalence in the population" (Schutt, 1999, p. 129). This approach will ensure that some diversity in key characteristics is prevalent, and the sample resembles that of the larger population (ten minority and ten nonminority, nontraditional female undergraduate students). Purposive sampling, is defined as "...each sample element is selected for a purpose, usually because of the unique position of the sample elements" (Schutt, 1999, p. 130). Nontraditional students in this study came from backgrounds that differed in terms of age (25-65), religion, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The snowball sampling method was also used, where "...you identify one member of the population and speak to him or her, then ask that person to identify others in the population...and so on" (Schutt, 1999, p. 131).

The researcher is aware that these procedures did not yield a representative sample; however, they were able to provide what is needed in case studies regarding the

experiences of nontraditional female undergraduate students. The researcher, faculty members, and students at a two-year public community college--from the Social Science, Education, and Nursing Departments--were able to identify and recommend participants. A sociology professor, the Director of Continuing Adult Recruitment, and students from a private four-year college were also able to identify and recommend nontraditional female undergraduate students who fit the profile for this study.

The samples in this research study are enrolled in either a two-year or four-year institution of higher education. They attend part time, full time, day, evening and weekend classes. Some of these women have specific career goals and objectives. Yet, several are not sure of their career paths but are "feeling" their way through the process. Many of the women in this study may view themselves as feminists, while others are fearful and even suspicious of the many versions of feminism (Ellsworth 1989; Lather 1991). This study was conducted during the fall semester of 1999, spring, summer and fall semesters 2000, and the winter session of 2001. Students took courses offered in various departments.

All of the students were from various towns and cities in this midwestern state. A significant number (14) of the subjects were married; four (4) were divorced, and two (2) were single who never married and had no children. The sample consisted of ten (10) African Americans and ten (10) Caucasian participants. Twelve of the women were returning college students, and eight of the participants were attending college for the first time. The age of the participants range from 26-53, and they were either employed full and/or part-time, and one participant was retired and training for a new career.

These characteristics of the nontraditional or adult population mirror the national trends and statistics (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Cross, 1981; Aslanian, 1989; and others).

Instrumentation

There were three different approaches to this study: a) a survey instrument or questionnaire, (b) one-on-one taped unstructured interviews, and (c) a general guideline and topics for informal focus groups. The survey instrument (see Appendix A) consists of seventeen (17) questions that captured the demographic background information for each of the twenty-four (24) participants. The survey instrument was based on the review of the pertinent literature and was modified for this specific study (Cross, 1978; Silling, 1984; Lewis, 1988; and others).

The survey instrument was reviewed by a social science research professor and dissertation committee members. A sample of students in an Introduction to Sociology course pilot tested the survey. These students were asked to critically review the questions and make suggestions and comments in regards to clarity and content. As a result of the reviews and pilot test, the following questions were added to the questionnaire: 5 (a) hours spent studying and 7 (b) organizational affiliation on campus.

Research Questions

The types of questions participants will be responding to include the following (all questions are listed in the Appendix B):

1. Briefly describe your high school experiences.
2. What motivational factors influenced your decision to attend college?
3. Describe your experience in the classroom setting, and discuss which classroom environment works best for your learning style.

4. As a nontraditional female student, do you feel that your identity is being silenced by the institution (race, gender, age, or other factors)?
5. What obstacles or barriers make an impact on your academic success (situational, institutional, dispositional)?

Also, other perceived differences will be examined between first and second-generation college students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in comparison to those from middle- to upper-class backgrounds. Types of support systems nontraditional women have in place and the assistance these support systems provide will be explored. (See Appendix B for complete list of research questions.) Other barriers which may hinder their academic success will be identified. If barriers exist, I will attempt to determine if they are consistent with established research categories--situational, institutional, and dispositional.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted in person at the location that was designated by each participant. Some interviews took place in the homes of participants, at their college setting, library, student lounge, anywhere that was comfortable for the participant. Each interview was tape recorded with the consent of the participants. Transcriptions were produced by the researcher, and each participant received copies of all transcriptions by mail or in person. Participants reviewed all transcripts for verification and revision.

Focus Group Guidelines

A focus group was conducted at each of the colleges selected for this research study. Guidelines for the focus groups were developed by the researcher and were based on the works of Stewart & Shamdasani (1990) and *Successful Focus Groups*, edited by

David L. Morgan (1993). (See Appendix C). The main objective for using focus groups as a data collection method was to further obtain rich qualitative information to complement the one-on-one taped unstructured interviews and to have participants interact with each other to enhance the validity and utility of the research process.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings as they relate to the research questions used in the study. Since there were no substantive differences between the sentiments expressed in the focus group and those expressed in the interviews. The interviews provided more depth and richness; thus, I will focus on them in this section. The findings also include the voices of the 20 women who provided the data for this investigation. They requested that their names not be used; therefore, pseudonyms have been given to each of the participants to protect their anonymity. First, for each question, the findings will be presented intra-racially for those Black women attending the community college and those at the four-year private college. This will be followed by a comparative summary statement. Secondly, as in the case for the Black students, the findings will be provided intra-racially for the White women attending the community college and the four-year private college. A summary statement will also be provided for this group of students. Finally, an inter-racial comparative summary will be presented for each of the questions. In essence, the comparative summaries will provide some general statements about the similarities and differences between the Black students as well as the White students.

Community College Cohorts

The participants attending the community college consisted of ten nontraditional women ranging in age from 26 to 53. Five of these women are Black, and five are White. Their backgrounds are diverse, representing various socio-economic, religious, and

educational statuses. At one time, all of these women were married, but three were divorced at the time of this study. Nine of the women have children.

The ten nontraditional women are as follows: **Black participants** (1) Dionne 38, married two children, (2) Journey 39, married, three children, (3) Maya 26, married, one child, (4) Natasha 38, divorced, three children, (5) Esther 53, divorced, no children: **White participants** (1) Janet 41, married, two children, (2) May 44, married, five children, (3) Samantha 26, divorced, one child, (4) Desiree 48, married, three children, and (5) Candie 40, married, two children.

Four-year Private College Cohorts

The participants attending the four-year private college consist of ten nontraditional women ranging in age from 26 to 48. Five of these women are Black and five are White. Their backgrounds are also diverse and represent varying socio-economic, religious and educational statuses. At one time eight of these women were married but one was divorced at the time of this study. Seven of the women have children and one woman has two foster children. Also, there were two women who were never married and have no children.

The ten nontraditional women are as follows: **Black participants** (1) Ophelia 37, divorced, one child, (2) Sarah 26 married, four children, (3) Sylvia 45, married, three children, (4) Meleka 40, married, five children, (5) Lori 35, married, two foster children; **White participants** (1) Leslie 41, married, five children, (2) Alexandria 48, married two children, (3) Beth 40, single, no children, (4) Sharon 44, married two children, (10) Amy 35, single, no children.

Five Black Female Students at the Community College – Question 1

Briefly describe your high school experiences.

A review of the narratives revealed that none of the Black women attending the community college had “very positive” experiences during their high school days. Two of them, however, had experiences that could be easily categorized as being “positive” in the sense that they were encouraged by teachers and/or family members to excel. It seems that mentors were important in the lives of these students, even when those persons were not teachers, but administrators. This observation was seen in Esther’s (53) narrative. She revealed that:

I had a beautiful high school, year and I had great mentors. Mr. _____ who I believe was principal at the time...always advocating education, and he was the one who encouraged me and other students that we could do whatever we wanted to do... When I graduated from high school in 1965, I had intended to go to college. What happened was that I delayed it for another year, and I went to the community college in 1966.

Even when the students did not find a mentor in the school building, they still had a positive experience in high school when their parents were supportive and made it known that they had high expectations for their children. This experience is reiterated in Maya’s (26) experience as she revealed the role of her parents and that of an African American counselor in her predominantly white school:

My mother is a RN and my father works for a big company and they each had high expectations of me...the only African American guidance counselor...would help all of the African American students with college applications, scholarships and things like that...she showed us the different types of scholarships...so we could avoid having to take out so many loans. She was a blessing.... I graduated from high school with honors in June 1993 and started college in August of that same year, but I came home in May of 1997 because of a personal issue.

For other Black students in the community college category, their high school experience ranged from “drifting through” to an experience that could be characterized as having both positive and negative aspects. Only one student, Dionne (38), felt that her experience was one where she drifted through and missed out on a quality education. In her own words, she stated that:

I didn't like high school. I went to high school in the shadow of my brothers and sisters. The principal did not particularly care for them. They gave her a run for her money. They were little rascals so to speak....therefore, it made things difficult for me... At first I thought it was just me and that I was being paranoid, but after trying so many different things that didn't work out... So I just pretty much didn't try to get involved in anything else.... As I reflect back, I just went through, not guided. They had counselors then, if that's what you want to call them. That's how I look at it. I completed high school without taking Biology. As of this day, I don't know how that happened. I got out of high school without taking classes that were the norm, like algebra. I had my first algebra class in college. The sad thing about it is years later you realize how much of your earlier education was lacking, or you realize how much you did not receive.

The final two Black women in the community category had some rather painful experiences during their high school days. However, they still were able to do well academically in spite of unpleasant circumstances at home and in school. In the one instance, Journey (39) talks about:

My high school experience was not good. I didn't have support, but I didn't feel confident enough to reach out to the support that was there... Academically I did fine...My problem was not with drugs or alcohol. My father left us. I was just going into middle school when he left my mother to finish raising four children on her own. It was a struggle... The most positive and beneficial experience that I can remember about growing up is my mother raising us up in the church....I didn't have that fatherly love that I needed. I don't know what caused it. That was my problem in high school. Which did lead to getting pregnant at age fifteen...childhood I once had was over. Reality kicked in...I did graduate with my class and after graduation attended college for about a year...got my daycare license and did daycare for about six years. Also, I got married right out of high school... We are still married and happy. Like I said, out of that whole situation and that life I was living as a young person came a mature person making positive things out of her life.

In spite of a pregnancy and drug experimentation while in high school, Natasha (38)--not unlike Journey--was able to graduate on time with her classmates. She was fortunate to have the support of her family and at least one teacher at her school. Natasha tells us in her own voice that:

My high school is kind of difficult to describe because I got pregnant in the ninth grade. So after I had my son...I started experimenting with drugs and stuff like that and that had an impact on my high school experience. Overall it was a good school, predominately White, and I didn't have what I would call mentors, but there was one teacher who befriended me, and that made a difference. Academically, I did well and did not let my pregnancy affect my being successful. In fact, I graduated on time with my class... My family support was good. I was adopted... They were supportive in watching my son when they could and finding a babysitter and paying for it when I went back to high school... After I had my child, I got involved in drugs because of esteem issues. The situation that I had involved molestation, and that's what got me frustrated. It wasn't a brief encounter. It was something that had gone on for a number of years. So the drugs were a way for me to escape, and I ended up being addicted to drugs for a long time... So my high school years were difficult in a sense because I had a child too young, and I got involved with drugs and the whole issue of molestation. However, with all of that going on in my life, academically I did pretty good.

Further review of the narratives revealed that the positive and negative experiences of the Black women in this category were possibly influenced by either issues of race, social class, or gender. Three of the students attending the community college discussed how race was a factor in their negative high school experience. For Dionne (38), her negative high school experience was not only influenced by being in the shadow of her older siblings, who were viewed by the principal as troublemakers, it was also influenced by her race and possibly her working-class background. In Dionne's own voice, she said that:

You know they just put me in classes, nothing challenged me. It seemed that many of the Black kids were given the easy courses like typing, vocational, and trade skills kind of classes, and that's the way it was. There was no one to take an interest in me and no one to encourage me or give me the support and the guidance I desperately needed. I was scheduled to go to college right after high

school, but I did not go. An incident occurred in my family between my mother and me, and I moved out of the house. This is an example of what lack of guidance there was in my life. I thought that since I moved out of my home that I had lost my financial aid. Instead I got married right of high school.

It was a common practice in many public schools to track or socially place students in alternative less challenging academic programs based on race, gender, or social class. Therefore, because of race, class, and gender, Dionne experienced social placement. Her mother was a single parent and worked for a production company full time. Therefore, she was not able to provide Dionne with the guidance she needed to become a successful student or to assist her in her college endeavors.

It was revealed in Journey's (38) narrative the impact that racial isolation and oppression made on her high school experience. This realization made an impact on why she did not feel confident seeking out any support within her high school. In her own voice, Journey said that:

As a Black girl attending a school that was mostly White, I just didn't feel valued. I grew up feeling inferior both inside the school and outside in the wider society because I live in a world where Black people just didn't matter. You didn't feel like you compared. You didn't feel like you could do what the dominant White society could do

Maya (26) was at the other end of the stratification hierarchy. Her mother has a RN degree and worked as a manager, and her father is a skilled tradesperson for a large manufacturing company. Her basically "normal" high school experience was, to some degree, influenced by race and the pressures from her parents to succeed. She had this to say:

If I had to grade my high school experience, I would give it a C. The teachers were predominately White, and I didn't receive a lot of mentoring...the only African American guidance counselor we had and she acted like more than a guidance counselor...She was the only one that would help all of the African American students with college applications, scholarships, and things like that.

She showed us the different types of scholarships that were out there so we could avoid having to take out so many loans. She was a blessing. Because of her I secured a full scholarship and went to a four-year university right after high school... I played softball, basketball, and I was a member of the orchestra. It wasn't voluntary; my parents made me.

Although Maya described her high school experience as neutral, she graduated from high school with honors.

Of the five Black students in this category, three of them are first generation college students, whose parents were not high school graduates. This factor had an impact on or influenced their overall high school experiences. Further, their high school experiences could be categorized as being influenced by race, social class, gender, "triple jeopardy," or what has come to be labeled the matrix of domination. This latter concept will be further discussed in chapter five of this research study.

Five Black Female Students at the Four-Year Private College – Question 1

Briefly describe your high school experiences.

Of the nontraditional Black students who attended a four-year private college, two of them had either a "very positive" or "positive" experience during their high school days. Sarah (26) claimed that she had a very positive high school experience in that she found mentors among her teachers, was very active in high school activities, and maintained better than a "B" average. She said:

I think my high school experience was very positive. I had mentors who encouraged me. I was very active. I was a cheerleader. I was in student council and on the Superintendent Board of Directors. I was listed in the outstanding high school yearbook. I did very well in school, and I got good grades... I was in Upward Bound Program; it was a program to inspire children of parents who had not gone to college to go to college. I was in that program for four years... However, I am not a first generation college student. My mother has her master's degree. She was also a nontraditional female student...I went right on to a four-year institution after high school, and I stayed there for two years and took a small

break and went on to another college. I took another break for maybe a year and went back and got my associates degree.

Ophelia (37), on the other hand, was raised in a single-parent family. This situation, however, did not deter her from having a very positive experience in high school. She tells us that:

My parents divorced shortly after my younger brother was born. My mom worked as a nurse's aid and always stressed the importance of education, and she encouraged us to be actively involved in high school activities. I was active in cheerleading. I was popular throughout high school. I went to military balls, proms, and sweetheart swirls at my local high school, as well as other high schools in the western area. Overall, my high school experience was pretty good. I did not have any teachers who encouraged me academically, and as I reflect back, I probably could have done better... After I graduated from high school in 1981, I did start attending the community college that fall. I did very well academically; I got three A's and two B's. I did better than when I was in high school and I was working a full and part-time job. But I dropped out of college and got married at the age of seventeen and was married for fifteen years.

That all students were not held to high standards by their teachers and administrators is not a recent phenomenon. Unfortunately, today as well as yesterday, too many students simply received what some have called "an attendance diploma" from high school. Students who were troublemakers, as well as those who were attractive and likable, were victimized by their educational institution because of the "passing phenomenon." They either did not master the subject matter or, in many instances, were not exposed to certain subjects. Or when they were exposed to topics that were thought to be demanding, their teachers often held them to a pattern of low expectation. Meleka (40) was apparently one of those students who was well-liked by her teachers, and she makes the observation that:

...but I had a lot of teachers that if you are nice and they like you, they had a tendency just to pass you through. So I experienced a lot of that. That was most of them. Like the classes I should have gotten, like the math and science, I had a difficult time, but because they liked me I was just passed through. I didn't have

so much encouragement, you didn't have, like now, where counselors are really helpful. I didn't have too much of that....I graduated a year early and it was my plan to go to college. But, I got a really good job and....20 or so years later I went back.

A reading of the narratives provided by two of the nontraditional Black students attending a four-year private college revealed that their high school experience was "very negative." They suffered from self-esteem issues and the kind of circumstances that frequently force young women to leave school at an early age and never return. Fortunately, the two women in this instance were able to reorient their lives and gain the type of control such that they were able to aspire to a better quality of life in spite of pregnancies and dropping out of school at an early age. Sylvia (45), among other revelations, makes the very telling statement about the quality of preparation she received in her earlier education when she states:

...I was a low achiever and a product of Title I Program, which meant that I didn't learn to read until late, like after the sixth grade...So high school was hard, not to mention that I had two kids while I was in high school. Well, I had one child in junior high, and in high school I had another little girl...I didn't have friends in high school. I don't have friends now either. I guess I'm not really a friendly person...Because my parents wanted me to get a college education... but the college experience was not a very good experience... I was not prepared, and I didn't have a good counselor... I didn't have a clue... So my first experience at the university was a flop, and I stayed there for almost two years and ended up on academic probation.

Lori (35), the other Black student whose high school experience was less than she desired, did not have as much family support as Sylvia--the nurturing, encouraging support that has proven to be an essential determinant in whether students stay in school and do well in their grades. Lori describes her dilemma in the following terms:

Okay, with my high school, I actually had to drop out of high school when I was sixteen due to family circumstances, specifically issues with my mother. I was in foster care and stuff like that, and I was in group homes. So I dropped out when I was sixteen, and I went back to school when I was twenty-four. When I dropped

out... I did so to work full-time and to pay for an apartment and stuff like that...My initial stages as a teenager were very rough on me because I had to work a job and pay rent...I did not have a chance to be a teenager...I was like twenty-four, and finally I decided I can't keep living like this, so I got my GED within a week. I took all five tests. I went to the library to study for it and I took the pretest and passed them and everyday I would take one and my goal was within the five days to take the five tests. So I really trained and taught myself. I studied for math, reading, language arts – everything. I scored very high; I got like a 303, and I think that I needed only 250, and I ended up with my GED.

A summary of the narratives of the five Black women in this category revealed that there were three students whose “very positive” or “very negative” high school experiences were influenced by the intersection of race, class, and gender. Sarah believed that her high school experience was “very positive.” It appears that her “very positive” experience could have been influenced by the fact that her parents are middle-class. Research studies and biographies of individuals from middle-class and upper-class backgrounds, with college-educated parents, generally have more positive educational experiences. Middle-class families can provide positive mentoring outside of the schooling environment, and that can make a positive impact on their overall academic success of their children. Sarah (26) had this to say:

I am not a first generation college student; my mother has her master's degree. I am second generation. When I was in high school my mom went back to college. We would spend time studying together, and she would share a lot of stuff with me about college. She never asked me if I was going to college, only which one. She has been a wonderful support system for me. Her success has been my success, and mine hers.

The fact that her mother was college educated provided her with the mentoring and guidance she needed to be a successful high school student. Also, her mother was able to navigate her through the college process, which was a factor that was lacking for some of the other women in this category.

Due to family issues and having to drop out of high school and live on her own, Lori (35) characterized herself as having “no class.” She had this to say:

I lived on my own at the age of sixteen and worked in a hotel, cleaning rooms. I definitely had to be an adult...I considered myself no class because I had to struggle on my own with no one to support me and give me guidance.

It became apparent that her social class, and the lack of positive mentors inside or outside of her school, negatively impacted her decision to stay in school. Further, she had no choice but to take on adult responsibilities of working and providing herself with food, clothing, and shelter. This eliminated any possibility of a typical or “normal” high school experience.

The last student in this category attended high school during and after the civil rights moment and attended a high school that was integrated earlier by her older siblings. Therefore, Sylvia (45) could add the isolation, due to race, as a factor in her “not good” high school experience. She said that:

I remember a teacher I called KKK because I felt that she was all of the things those letters assimilated. She made things very difficult for me; therefore that was another reason I did not like school. Sometimes it was hard to tell if you were being treated unfairly because of your race or the fact that my parents were not educated and worked hard to support all of us kids. I don’t know. But I do know that during the time I grew up, if you were a girl, a Black girl and poor, things weren’t all that good.

Summary of the Ten Black Female Students - Question #1

The high school experiences of the Black students attending a community college did not differ significantly from those nontraditional Black female students matriculating at a private four-year college in that there was a continuum of experiences that ranged from very positive to very negative. Though there were those in the community college category whose high school experiences were generally positive, none had a “very

positive” experience, but there was one student in the four-year college category who said that she had a “very positive” experience.

In each student category, there was one student who felt that her high school experience was essentially one where, for various reasons, she was allowed to drift through the grades without much effort. As a matter of fact, in retrospect, they realized that they were penalized—not enriched—educationally when they encountered the college environment. Once in college it became obvious that their high school experience of being passed from one grade to the next without having to work at the subject matter had not adequately prepared them for the quality of academic work expected of a college student. Also the fact that some were placed in alternative and less challenging academic curriculums was viewed as a detriment to their education.

Interestingly, the most negative high school experience was felt by more students attending the four-year private college than those at the community college level. As a matter of fact, two of the four-year Black college students made it known that their high school experience was fraught with one dilemma after another: pregnancies, drugs, dropping out, and more. Though two of the Black community college students said that their high school experience could be characterized as having both positive and negative aspects, no one in this category claimed that their high school life was “very negative,” and each graduated with a high school diploma. That was not the case for the four-year private college female students. One dropped out but received her GED years later.

It became apparent after reviewing the narratives in reference to their high school experiences, the lack of mentoring and/or lack of guidance played a crucial role in the experiences of eight of the ten Black students. Those who had some type of guidance,

regardless if it was within the schooling environment or outside, experienced positive, very positive, or average experiences. Thus, having mentors who assisted them in the process of becoming educated and making the transition from high school to college was vital to their appreciation of education and influenced their desire to acquire more.

The women with negative experiences lacked any form of mentoring inside or outside of their schooling environment. Seven of these women lacked mentoring relationships during high school--three at the community college and four attending the four-year private college. One of the women attending the four-year private college mentioned having positive mentors in junior high and no mentors in high school. Therefore, the lack of positive mentoring relationships made an impact on their overall schooling experiences.

These ten Black students recalled what schooling was and was not, including their perceptions of "success" and "failure." It was apparent in many of their narratives that their high school years were filled with issues of isolation, racial, class and gender oppression, frustration, and a lack of self-worth. Another consistency between many of these Black students is the fact that they were aware of their disadvantaged position in their earlier educational experiences. This awareness of their disadvantaged position was based on the "matrix of domination," i.e. race, class and gender, from primary school through college. Therefore, race, class and gender issues also appeared to have an impact on the experience of these ten Black women. Eight of the working class Black students felt that because of their race, class, and gender, they received little or no support nor encouragement. Many of these students understood that race, class and gender really do matter, as they were overlooked, socially passed from grade level to grade level, and/or

socially placed in less challenging academic curriculums. Further, these Black students believed that schooling was a place where one was supposed to acquire the knowledge that could move them beyond their working-class beginnings. However, there was one Black student in the community college category and one in the four-year private college category who had very different experiences due to their socio-economic background. This factor affected their preparedness for college, as they both graduated from high school with honors and received full academic scholarships to four-year colleges. Also, both of these Black students received positive mentoring either inside or outside of their educational environment. Positive mentoring gave them an edge over the other Black students. On the other hand, there was one Black student in the four-year private college category who characterized herself as “no class,” which is considered synonymous with the “underclass,” who experienced high school negatively because of having to drop out to become self-supporting. She was the only student who reported such a detrimental experience.

Of these ten Black college students, four of them--two in the community college category and two in the four-year private college category--appeared to have adapted well to their integrated high school settings, and the others did not. These six Black students, regardless if their experiences were average, neutral, or positive, did not feel like outsiders. Whereas, the other Black women reported that their secondary experiences consisted of constraints in regards to family issues, isolation, alienation, and oppression. Many of these Black students experienced hostility from instructors, and counselors who did not guide or encourage them to reach their full academic potential. Therefore, it was apparent that they did not interact with instructors and/or counselors who possessed an

awareness of racial or ethnic diversity. This lack of diversity led those instructors and/or counselors to interact with these Black students on the basis of stereotypes and myths about them as women of color.

In sum, regardless of their high school experiences and the amount of time since their high school graduation, each of the ten Black women has pursued additional education at the collegiate level after spending time in other pursuits.

Five Female Black Students at the Community College – Question 2

What motivational factors determined your return to college?

After a careful review of the narratives, several factors revealed themselves to fall either in the primary or secondary category. Primary factors were: to improve the quality of life, to finish what I started, to be a role model for others, it is my time to get my degree, and the need for credentials. The secondary motivational factors were as follows: the convenient college location, cost effectiveness for attending college, the small campus environment, and small classroom size.

Journey (38) was the only Black woman in the community college category who reported quality of life as a motivational factor. She also discussed secondary factors as well. She said that:

...our daughter is going to be graduating from high school in a few years, and I do not want her to go through the financial struggle that we went through... So I got to finish...before she gets her diploma. It's my time now...I can go to school and do what I want to do...Plus the community college is convenient and it is cost effective for me and my husband.

On the other hand, Esther (53) was the only woman who is retired. She cited several motivational factors related to her decision to return to college. She offered the following primary and secondary reasons for pursuing her college education:

I always wanted to go into teaching, and now that I am retired I can go back and get my degree. So I am retired and I came back to finish what I had started earlier... I want to do this for myself, not my parents, but for me. I am committed to my education. I have the time to devote to my college education and at the same time to broaden my horizon.

Three of the women in the community college category realized that in order for them to move ahead professionally, they needed credentials and, thus, acquiring a college education became a primary goal. According to Dionne:

The company I was with for six years was making vast changes into the selling field, and it was totally not for me. Another reason was really a life-changing experience. I had overheard someone I knew ask this person who was over a special grant program why they did not ask me to teach the dance classes...this person replied that I did not have a degree and that I was not certified...So I simply decided that it was time for me to go back and get my degree. It is time to focus on what I wanted to do...The community college is a good college; it is close to home, and it is much more affordable than attending a four-year college.

Maya (26) the youngest student in this category also revealed the need for credentials as a motivational factor for returning to college. She also cited some secondary factors as well. Maya said that:

I knew that I would need a college education to get to where I want to be in life professionally. I came to basically finish what I had started a few years ago. Plus, I am doing this for myself. I am not being pressured by anyone. I am doing this for me...When I first graduated from high school with honors, my parents had these expectations, and I wasn't trying to make myself happy. I no longer feel that pressure. Also, another factor is that this community college is close to home, and it is more cost effective for me and my husband at this time.

Although, Natasha (38) was also interested in obtaining credentials to realize her career goals, she was also the only Black woman in this category who cited being a role model for others as a primary factor. She expresses in her own words what primary and secondary factors motivated her to return to college:

I am interested in opening a youth center in this area, and I wanted to get some credentials behind me in order to follow through on that... I know that I want to work with youth and make a difference. Because of my past experiences, I know

that young people need some place to go where they can discuss issues that they cannot discuss with anyone else...Being a single mother, this college is not too far from home if I have to check on my children. Cost is another factor. So it is cost effective for me at this time.

Five Black Female Students at Private Four-Year College – Question 2

What motivational factors determined your return to college?

Of the Black women attending the private four-year college, three of them revealed the need to improve their quality of life as one of their primary factors for returning to college. They also cited other primary and secondary factors. Accordingly, two of these women, Ophelia (37) and Sarah (26), along with Sylvia (45) also indicated that they were motivated to finish what they had started earlier. Lori (35), who was the only woman in this category who was a high school dropout, had this to say:

I decided that I needed to go to school. So I started off attending a medical technical school, and I liked the program...So I went to a community college and got a two-year degree, and I received a full-time academic scholarship to a four-year college. My GPA was a 3.8... I ended up going there for one semester, and I felt like a number. The college was large and so were the classes, plus the commute was killing me, too, having to get to work and then to get to college for classes. Then I decided to come to this college because it is close to home...I gave up my scholarship for convenience and smaller class size.

Ophelia (37), the other Black student who was also motivated to attend college to improve her quality of life, had these words to say about why she was motivated to return to college:

Being a single parent, basically I wanted to provide a better life for my daughter and myself. I want to do this for me. When I was younger my whole family wanted me to go into nursing. I guess I was a people pleaser. I am back now for me to study what I want to study, to do my own thing so to speak...I have to mention that my daughter's teacher was affiliated with this college. She made some calls to her contacts, got me a job here and even got me financial support to assist in my education. So that is basically why I am here at this four-year private college.

On the other hand, Sarah (26), the youngest Black woman in four-year private college category, had this to say about her primary and secondary motivational factors.

I always wanted a degree, and I think after having my children I wanted it more for them so I could provide for them more adequately. I would have more income and would set an example for them that they should go to school.

Not only was it important for Sarah to provide a better quality of life for her family, it was also important for her to be a model for her children.

Although, Sylvia (45) discussed her primary and secondary reasons for returning to college, she was also the only woman in the four-year private college category who was motivated to return to college because her husband divorced her because she was not educated. She voiced that:

I always wanted to finish, always...I was divorced from my husband, and one of the things he said was that I wasn't educated. I didn't have a degree, and he wanted a wife with a degree, among other things. That's what he said. You know I worked and helped put him through school, and now it is my turn. My turn to get my degree. My turn to do something for me that I always wanted to do... the school district I work for had scholarship or financial support for employees to take classes at this institution so that was the initial factor and the fact that it is close and it wasn't too big that I would get lost.

The last Black student in this category, Meleka (40), was the only woman who had one primary and one secondary motivational factor for returning to college. In her own words she said that:

I got really discouraged at the nonprofit organization I was working for...the psychiatrist they would basically use all of the information I gave them on the residents I was responsible for. That was what they were using to make their different judgments on. It's like they are getting paid all of this money, and I could never advance upward because I did not have a degree. So without a degree you stay at a certain level...that is what motivated me to go back to school...this college has smaller class size. Plus, I can get more personal one-on-one attention from the teachers. This further motivated me to return to college.

Summary of the Ten Black Female Students -- Question 2

The motivational factors of the nontraditional Black students attending a community college did not differ significantly from those of the Black students attending a private four-year college. Five of the Black students attending the community college had multiple primary and secondary motivational factors for returning to college and four of the nontraditional Black students attending the four-year private college had multiple primary and secondary motivational factors for returning to college. There was only one student at the four-year private college with only one primary and one secondary factor for returning to college.

Of the ten Black women, only two reported that they were interested in becoming role models for others as a primary motivational factor for returning to college. One of these women is interested in working with troubled youth, and the other female student is interested in being a role model for her children so they can understand the importance of education. Three of the four women were motivated to return to college in hopes of improving their quality of life for their families. Five of the women--two attending the community college and three attending the four-year private college-- reported that they are motivated by the need to finish what they had started years ago--to complete their degrees once and for all, to stop taking classes here and there, and to commit to finishing their degrees for themselves.

Five of these ten Black students--four in the community college category and one in the four-year private college category--indicated that they were motivated to return to college because of their need for credentials to achieve their career goals. Also, five of these women--four in the community college category and one in the four-year college

category--mentioned that they were motivated simply because it is now their turn to complete their education. These women no longer accept or let the influence of others affect their choices of pursuing their dreams of an education. They are doing things their way and for their own self motivation.

The secondary motivational factors--convenience, cost effectiveness, and campus/classroom size--were the three categories that the Black students attending the community college consistently listed. All five of the Black students listed convenience and cost effectiveness as their secondary factor for returning to college. In the community college category, only two women listed campus and classroom size as a motivational factor, and one woman was motivated to attend the community college because she felt it was a good college. In comparison, of the five Black students attending the four-year private college, three women reported that the convenient location of the college was a secondary motivational factor; whereas, three of these Black students were motivated to attend this private college because of the small campus environment and the small classroom size (15-20 students). It was important for them to be able to receive more one-on-one attention from professors. Research has shown that many nontraditional students fare better in smaller classroom environments.

Two Black students felt that the private college provided good academic programs, which was one of their deciding factors for attending. A motivational factor for three of the Black women in the private four-year college category dealt with their ability to receive financial support from either their employer or the private college. Because this private college is expensive, financial support became a primary motivational factor for their

return to higher education. None of the five students attending the four-year college listed cost effectiveness as a motivational factor.

In conclusion, there were diverse reasons why these ten Black students decided to further their education. Regardless if they attend a community college or a four-year private college, and regardless of the age of the student (26-53), their motivational factors were similar. Some of their reasons were to fulfill their personal goals, to add financial stability to their families and/or make a difference in their communities. Some have multiple reasons and others do not. Regardless of the reasons, nontraditional female students want to accomplish their goals for themselves; to affirm themselves.

Five Black Female Students at the Community College – Question 3

Describe your experience in the classroom setting and discuss which classroom environment you believe will work best for your learning style.

The Black nontraditional female students in the community college category experienced classroom environments that were either actively engaging students or a traditional lecture format. These community college categories were labeled as either positive or negative. One Black female student reported that her experiences were neither positive nor negative; it was what she had expected--just school. Two of the women in this category discussed that when they attended this community college earlier, they had more negative experiences than they are having presently. Esther (53) said that:

When I attended earlier and was in the nursing program, it was not a positive experience for me. Students were not encouraged to speak experientially or to actively participate in classroom discussion... The experience I am having here now is positive; all of my professors encourage you to actively participate which works best for me because I value experiential learning. The books are fine because you need the books in order to learn the different educational theories and so forth... In fact, I think I learn more when I can rely on my experiences and use that to assist and help me understand the material in the book... I am fortunate

this semester because all of my professors use a combination lecture and facilitation environment...I value education, and I am happy with my growth and development since returning to college. I am able to transcend memorizing for the test, but learning and incorporating what I learn into my everyday life and that will benefit my future career.

On the other hand, Dionne (38) had this to say in comparing her past and present classroom experiences. She said that:

When I was attending here earlier my experiences were not as memorable as they have been this semester. There was no such thing as anticipation. It was not that participating was not allowed, it just was not encouraged, and when you are not encouraged you do what is expected, nothing... This semester has been a blessing. In both of the classes--sociology and psychology--the professors respect, encourage and expect the students to speak experientially. Both professors use a combination of lecture and active class participation. In fact, in the sociology class the professor sets aside one day a week for discussion and reflection on the text and our views about what's going on in our everyday world... Personally, I learn so much more in an active environment. I found that I have to read a chapter two or three times in order to understand the material...in an active environment I actually learn more and can recall beyond the test, but when professors use straight lecture, I more or less try to memorize my notes so I can pass the test, and for me that just does not work. I value learning and growing, not just memorizing.

Review of the narratives revealed that the Black students in this category value learning and not merely memorizing. According to feminist and critical pedagogy, interactive learning environments can allow women the opportunity to utilize their lived experiences as a standpoint for conceptualizing knowledge. It also allows women to construct for themselves knowledge that is both transforming and liberating, which can move women beyond memorization, towards learning, growth and development, as well as self and social empowerment. The other three Black women in the community college category expressed similar sentiments about their classroom experiences. Journey (38) voiced, in her own words, that:

Sometimes being the only Black person in the class can make things not too comfortable, and this semester I've had some negative classroom experiences

because of my race. Sometimes it depends on how comfortable the professors make you feel in regards to participating or not. In one class this semester the students were, well they didn't appreciate my comments and the sighs and head nodding from the students made me realize that I was not being taken seriously...the professor did not validate what I had to say and that was very uncomfortable. So in that class I chose to remain silent and just try to get a good grade...I found that my sociology professors have been very encouraging and respectful of your experiences. They want to know how you perceive things about society and how you view things from your experiences and perception...However, I have had many more professors who do not value your opinion or experiences. It is more or less this is it and that's it...I really do appreciate a more active learning environment. It works best for me...I guess to me you can read something in the book and gain terminology and this and that, but when you can connect it to something real you can understand and that understanding gives birth to real learning... Then it becomes more than just a concept. So for me this semester, it was a blessing to have the sociology and psychology classes; they made my semester much more positive than it would have been.

Maya (26), who is the youngest Black student in the community college category, had this to say about her classroom experience and the teaching/learning methods. Plus, she reported which environment she believes works best for her learning style. She said that:

For me, college is neither positive nor negative; it is just school. Basically it was what I had expected...This semester I have three classes, and in two of those classes we are encourage to speak experientially...the third class the professor is the type of instructor who bases everything on his own experiences and what he has encountered. He does not want to relate to anyone except himself. He does not allow the class to have any type of active participation...I view experiential learning in a positive way...one's life experience and being able to relay them to your education goes hand in hand...I definitely prefer a classroom environment where students are encouraged to actively interact with the professor and other student...I feel that when you are actively involved, more learning takes place beyond memorizing for the test...This does not equate to learning, growing and developing--just memorizing...Therefore, if I had a choice of learning environments, it certainly would consist of being actively involved in my learning environment.

A review of Natasha's (38) narrative revealed that she felt that it totally depends on the class whether or not she preferred an active or nontraditional learning environment. According to Natasha:

In the two classes I have this semester, students are expected and respected to speak experientially. In the other classes, I don't feel encouraged, but I don't feel discouraged either. I think it is just the way the class is designed. The way the instructors or the direction the instructors take makes the difference if you are able to participate...As far as which environment I prefer, I think it depends on the class. Science, math, chemistry, English and those types of classes I think I would only prefer lecture...For social type classes, I definitely prefer the group discussion and being able to take advantage of experiential learning.

Five Black Female Students at the Four-Year Private College – Question 3

Describe the classroom setting and discuss which classroom environment you believe will work best for your learning style.

A review of the narratives of those Black students in the four-year private college category showed that all five of the women preferred a more experiential, open, active teaching/learning environment. However, one of the students, Sarah (26), mentioned that she prefers book learning because that is what the professors generally prefer. But, if she had her say, an active environment would actually mean more learning. Another woman, Lori (35), presently prefers an environment that is lecture focused because she encountered a classroom environment that was too hostile for her to actively use her own voice. The following quotes capture these women's assessment of the classroom and which classroom environments they feel would work best for their learning style. Sarah (26) said that:

I prefer the book learning, because that is mostly what the professor uses. I know that all of the resources they will use to fulfill testing and paperwork will be in the book...This semester I have only one class where some active participation is allowed--the communication class...Other than that, it is straight lecture with the professor running the show...If I had a choice I prefer an active class, hands on

and small group discussion. More of an open forum where it is not strictly lecture and you just take notes...Being actively involved in your learning you tend to remember more than just taking notes. You actually learn the theories and the concepts because you can tie it to something real...But I am realistic to know that instructors mainly go with the book, so that is why I said book learning over experiential and active learning.

On the other hand Lori (35) had this to say about her classroom setting:

My experience in the classroom has been a negative one because in many instances it wasn't good always being the only Black person in the class. It seems as though my thoughts and ideas were not respected. When I try to participate in class, the professors or the students do not respect me. They seem to get a little perturbed...When you have a question or you want to say something I see people get angry and fly up...Even in classes where professors may respect and encourage you to speak out, and when I do voice my opinion I'm sorry after I open my mouth because of the reactions from the class, and the professors do not intervene on my behalf...So I just sit quiet and get through it and get my grade...However, if I could design my own classroom, I would prefer more diversity among the students and the professors--an environment where professors and students would respect differences and different experiences. I would love to learn in an active classroom where you could use your experiences to connect to the information in the text. Right now I'm not learning, just memorizing for the test and trying to get my degree.

Sylvia (45), the oldest Black student in the four-year private college category, reported that she had positive classroom experiences at the institution and that two professors especially validated her position as a nontraditional Black female student. Also, the fact that she is learning, when she thought she could not learn, has really been a plus for her. She had this to say:

I have had a good experience at this college. But this semester there is an instructor that is awesome. He and his wife teach here and they are good people. He appreciates my experiences and on a number of occasions...he has allowed me to take over his class. I have had four classes with him and he is great...with me being the only Black student in the class (which I am in most classes) he values me and the other students can see that...His wife is open but in a different way. She understands how life has been for Black women. I think she has a genuine way of opening herself up to understanding everybody. She is awesome. I said where do people like that come from because you don't see people like that. I have never experienced someone who was White and was that open. Therefore, it was because of their openness that I had such a positive experience this semester.

If you are just lecturing everyone is ready to go at 7:30 pm. If I am a part of what's going on, it sticks with me. It becomes yours. I like that. So more hands on, more dialogue and discussion, so I can use my experience as a bridge to the lecture, the concepts and the information in the book (I like the word you used, bridge). Then I am better able to retain the information. Then what I am learning has meaning and not just words in a book.

Another Black student, Ophelia (37), in the four-year private college category has been attending the college for two years and this is the first semester that she had two professors who used an active format. She believed that the two female professors genuinely cared about her being successful and have since become her mentors and have taken an active place in her educational life. Ophelia said that:

This semester I have had two professors who have really respected, expected and have encouraged me to speak experientially...Professor Q, the only Black professor that I have ever had has her own style; she teaches a whole different style and she encourages experiences. She is a great teacher...Her teaching style is so unique that you can't help but to learn, and she makes learning fun and educational all at the same time. She graduated from here and, in her senior year found out that she was ADD or something like that. Maybe that's why she is such a good teacher...Professor V was a White female professor, and she has a similar style as Professor Q, and they both want students to learn and they allow us to take a part in our learning. I have been here for two years, and I have learned more from those two women than in any other class. Other than the two I mentioned, all other professors use straight lecture and you just sit and take notes and that's about it. As a student with so much experience and I have also lived in other countries, I really do value experiential learning. Just sitting and taking notes for three to four hours really doesn't allow me to learn...I turn into a robot just writing and trying to stay awake. Plus, I have not learned a thing. I want to learn. If I was in control of my own learning environment I would like a very well mixed class, where you are not the only minority sitting there. But I do what I have to do because I want a good grade, and next year I hope to graduate.

The last woman in this category, Meleka (40), believes that going to college means getting an education regardless if she is encouraged to speak experientially or if the class is active or straight lecture. She will ask questions, make comments do what she has to do to understand the material. From her perspective, that's what education is

supposed to be all about, and because of the money she is spending, she plans to get what she deserves--a good education. Meleka had this to say:

My classroom experience was neither positive or negative because I just did what needed to be done. I am going to be graduating this summer, and I have gotten out of this education what I have put in--everything, my whole self. In the majority of my classes I am the only Black student, but I don't let that hinder me from getting the education I need and deserve. Even though most of my professors use a traditional lecture format where you are supposed to just sit there and take notes, I am never intimidated to openly express myself. I learned early on to take a tape recorder and type up my notes when I get home because if I spent the whole three-four hours taking notes, I won't know a thing. So I sit, listen, express myself and the recorder takes the notes...I personally value an active, more open learning environment...in fact, it was kind of hard for me to grasp on to certain reading material. When I could refer back to my past and present experiences, it not only helped me to learn the material, but to retain it as well. So active involvement works best for me. I found that even when professors respected and encouraged you to speak experientially, the students did not. I would get looks and sighs, so I got more negativity from the White students not the professor...Well let me tell you about one professor...In his class he would always cut me off and other nontraditional women. He expressed to one nontraditional woman that he felt that at a certain age women should not return to school. Then it became clear why he cut us off and why we got the lowest grades...Anyway; I prefer more of an actively engaged classroom environment, where you can really learn. I've been known to speak my mind regardless.

Summary of the Ten Black Female Students – Question 3

After reviewing the narratives of the ten Black women, similarities and differences emerged. They all reported that they viewed experiential learning or self-directed learning as positive and beneficial to their actual growth and development. An active teaching/learning environment would allow them to use their experiences as a bridge to understanding the text material. These women value education and believe that they were attending college to learn and to not just memorize the material. Although one female student in the four-year private college values an experiential, alternative classroom environment, she reported that she is realistic enough to know that professors

generally use a more traditional format. Therefore, she prefers a traditional classroom environment.

Nine of the ten Black students, regardless of the course, valued a learning environment that respected and encouraged them to use their own voices. These students further reported that they preferred a more engaged pedagogy where their professors respected their voices, thoughts, and ideas as they work collaboratively to gain knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. One woman in the community college category discussed only having an engaged pedagogy in specific classes. The social sciences type classes she felt were more appropriate for active participation and dialogue. Yet, one of the nine women who values a more nontraditional classroom environment and attends the four-year private college expressed that she was “realistic” and understood that most of the professors use a more traditional, lecture centered classroom. However, all ten Black women were and are interested in learning and moving beyond mere memorization. They all agreed that rote memory does not equate to actual learning. Therefore, they each seemed to appreciate and enjoy learning when they had the opportunity for more nontraditional engaged classroom activities.

It also became apparent that race and gender made an impact on the experiences of four of the nontraditional Black students. Race and gender appeared to be more of an issue at the four-year private college than the community college. Only two Black students in the community college category mentioned race as a negative issue within their classroom setting. Whereas, four of the five Black in the four-year private college category brought up the issue of race and gender and what it meant being the only Black student in their classes. Therefore, the “chilly climate” within the classroom impacted

their overall classroom experience. They believe that this type of teaching/learning environment would validate their humanity and not suppress their self-worth.

These Black students also reported that often they were not being educated in a participatory classroom environment. They were not respected, expected and encouraged to speak experientially. They did not let the environment hinder them from being successful college students. They still managed to work through their situations and complete the classes that were required to finish their degree programs. Some experienced racial hostility and chose to “go along to get along.” In other words, they chose to wear the “mask” in order to finish something that they all deemed important.

Five Black Female Students at the Community College – Question 4

As a nontraditional female student, do you feel as though your identity is being silenced by the institution (race, gender, social class)?

A review of the narratives of the Black students in the community college category could be categorized on a continuum of “yes, felt silenced,” and “no, does not feel silenced.” It was revealed that only one student felt silenced within her institutional environment. Journey (38) in her own words said that:

I don't feel that the school expects more of me because I am a nontraditional student. It seems to me that instructors are more understanding of older students. However, that can vary from instructor to instructor...As far as gender, I do not feel like my identity is being silenced. There are more women in college now...As far as class status, I do not at all feel silenced...Racially, yes, I do feel silenced in some respect. I am the only Black student in most of my classes, and I at times feel overlooked. It is just like the dominant society is always viewed in a better light than other cultures and groups. I feel as though I am not taken into consideration...If you say anything outside of what they consider normal or outside of their culture, it is like you are looked down upon. Like you know, OK she is Black, you know and that's how she is. All of your self-esteem and validation is gone. I feel like I am inside a hole or a box, and that is how I feel and I feel that way a lot... I won't say that for all teachers...It is sad. I look at the

Black instructors that we have here now and feel sorry that I did not have a chance to be in their classes. I have heard great things about them from Black and White students.

Four of the Black women in this category reported that they did not feel silenced within the institution. However, one woman did quantify that since she has been back at this institution, things have changed, and she's having a more positive experience. Dionne (38) had this to say:

Right now I can't say yes. From my perspective, things seem to be a bit more receptive than my earlier experiences. As a nontraditional student today there are later counseling appointments, some weekend classes, instructors are more flexible and willing to meet with you in the evenings. Having more diversity in staff and instructors is a real plus and provides a sense of security. It was wonderful having two Black professors. The Black female professor has developed into a positive mentor. I have never had a mentor before, and it feels good having some guidance and encouragement for a change. Both Black professors are interested in me...Especially the Black female professor because she has always been a nontraditional student herself. She provided me with a lot of support, understanding, and encouragement. Therefore, because of this, I did not experience alienation, isolation, or silencing because they were there to give me what I needed to get through.

The other three Black female students in the community college category each articulated that they also did not feel silenced in their college environment. They each stated that they "could be themselves." They all had similar responses to the question on being silenced; however, Maya also discussed that she couldn't be silenced. Also, she was the only Black student in this category who appeared to be so self-confident and self-assured about her identity as a Black woman. She said:

No, I feel like I can be myself. People may not like it, but I feel free to be myself. Sometimes a lot of people don't agree with what I have to say, but regardless, if someone agrees or not, I am going to say and express what I feel. I don't feel intimidated even if I am the only person of color in the class. I am not going to just sit there and be quiet if something is said that I disagree with. I will voice my opinion. I believe that it would be impossible for anyone in this institution to silence me, even if they tried. I am secure with myself, what I want to accomplish, and what I have to offer.

Another student, Natasha (38), in the community college category had this to say about “being herself.”

No, I don’t feel that pressure at all from the counselors or teachers. I feel as though I can just be me; that I can be myself.

Esther (53), the oldest participant in this study, voiced similar sentiments about her status as a Black student at the community college. In her own voice she said that:

No, I can’t say that I do. I really feel that I can just be me, just be myself. I am here to accomplish a goal, and I have been blessed to find people here who have been encouraging. No, I really don’t feel as though the institution silenced my identity in anyway.

Five Black Female Students at the Four-Year Private College – Question 4

As a nontraditional female student, do you feel as though your identity is being silenced by the institution (race, gender, social class)?

Of the nontraditional female students attending the four-year private college, one of them felt that she did not feel silenced within the college environment. Sylvia (45) claimed that she has experienced no silencing in reference to her identity. She said:

I have never felt that way. I never felt that anything about me has been silenced. It’s probably because I am not that type of person that you could silence...I personally haven’t experienced any negativity since I have been here, and I don’t know if it is because I just come and go, and do what I have to do and get out of here...I came here with a mission; its my turn to get my degree so I can do better for myself...I don’t recall anything relating to my race/ethnicity, gender or age. I think that it has been a plus. It might be because I am seasoned and knowing that by the time you get to be my age you come here and do what you need to do. I have heard professors say that they appreciate having nontraditional students in their classes. I don’t see being a nontraditional Black female student as a downfall; I see it as a pick me up, a positive.

There was another Black student in the four-year private college category who had a yes/no answer to this question. The reason her response was categorized as yes/no

was because she felt the environment could be silencing; however, she felt secure with her identity as a Black woman. Therefore, Meleka (40) had this to say about her experiences:

If you mean the overall campus environment, you know I think that here at this college they are so stuck up... The students aren't at all friendly. But that does not bother me. I have experienced isolation and alienation here, but like I said, I don't let that bother me from being successful. I have been here for three years, and I have no friends here at all. I could not give you one name... This being a religious college, I thought that things would be different, but it is worst. It is terrible. If you are not a strong person, you couldn't handle the environment here. But as for me, I don't need it. I know what I came here to do and if I meet friendly, supportive people fine. But, I don't need that. So yes, it could be discouraging, because the Whites look at you like what are you doing here. I got a lot of that... But by me being older and secure with myself, it didn't affect my success. In one class, because I was the only African American, the professor expected me to speak for my group, and in a way, that is a type of silencing.... It has not been easy, but sometimes for the things you really want, you have to be willing to meet the challenges.

There were three other women in the four-year private college category who responded yes to the question about feeling silenced within the institution. One of the students said that she felt reluctant because of her minority status; another said that she felt invisible, and the last Black student mentioned that because of the hostile environment that impacted her self-identity, she chose to be silent. Another Black student, Ophelia (37), had this to say about her feelings of silence within the institution.

Maybe as a minority female, at times I do feel silenced. Because of being Black, you are silent, invisible person anyway, and I just try to work through it... We are silent and sometimes invisible. In class sometimes if a minority person is making a point, they are cut off, and the instructor goes to the White person and never goes back to the person of color. Sometimes people have something important to say... Anyway, what I mean is that, yes, as a minority and as a female, I definitely feel silenced at times. But you go with the flow and do what has to be done in order to complete your classes and hopefully graduate. That's my purpose of being here--to graduate and complete my education so I can provide a better life for my daughter and myself.

Another Black student attending this private college also articulated similar sentiments about her identity being silenced by the institution: Sarah (26) said:

From what I have seen in reference to being a nontraditional student, nontraditional students are more vocal and are sterner with what they believe. So, therefore, in that respect we are not silenced... Sometimes when I go into the classroom and I am the only Black person, I am more reluctant to--I don't know, I guess it is because I am the minority in the classroom that I kind of sit back and scope things out first and find out if it is okay for me to be vocal and say things that I think and feel. When I attended here right out of high school there was a big stir about having Black History Month, and there were articles written around campus that there is not a White History Month. Those types of things, in a sense, can be silencing because we were not being validated, but from my perspective, attached... Sometimes during class, whenever the topic of discussion is about welfare, it was always in reference to Blacks. I didn't want to be argumentative so I sat back and didn't say anything. I decided to just remain silent. So in that respect, as a Black female, I have felt silenced.

On the other hand, Lori (35), the last student in this category, also discussed choosing to remain silent within the institutional environment. In her own words, Lori said:

Definitely silent, definitely, I'm definitely silent throughout this college community. I think it's like, I've been going here for a year and a half. I sit every Monday and Wednesday at the table by myself, and half of the people have been in class with me, and they will not speak. It's very very segregated to me. I feel isolated, alienated, and alone. But it's like wow, and I just look and laugh. It's like culture shock. I work with a very diverse group of people. When I come here they do not acknowledge me in class and they don't acknowledge me in that lunchroom outside of class. It is very difficult... As a Black woman and a nontraditional student, I do feel silence in my environment. I do not feel comfortable within the class, and I just stay to myself and do what I have to do in order to get a good grade. I interact as little as possible because I know how the other White students and sometimes the professors react to me, and it has not been pleasant in the past. This environment is definitely not welcoming or comfortable for students who look like me.

Summary of the Ten Black Female Students – Question 4

After reviewing the narratives of these ten Black nontraditional female students, it became apparent that they struggled with “double jeopardy.” All of them felt the

pressure of being both Black and female. However, many of them believed that race made a bigger impact on the silencing of their identities than gender. Further, they were socialized within the African American traditional “to go along to get along,” which can be translated into not making waves or to draw negative attention to oneself. In essence, you silence yourself when confronted with uncomfortable racial situations. Therefore, they each understood their social, cultural past as it relates to racial and gender inequalities.

The narratives revealed that of these ten Black students, many similarities and differences were revealed. Three of the ten Black students expressed that, if it were not for their strong sense of self-worth, they would have felt silenced, isolated, and alienated within their institutional environment. But, they continually discussed their strong sense of self and not being intimidated within their institutional environments. (One of these three women was in the community college category and appeared to have a strong personality and self-confidence beyond her twenty-six years.) It appeared that the “chilly” campus environment did not impact her sense of self-worth. The other two students were in the four-year private college category and also felt secure about their identities as Black women. However, they also stated that often times they were looked upon to be the Black voice and in that regard viewed that as a type of silencing. One of these students also expressed that in one particular class the nontraditional women were silenced by the male professor because he voiced to one of the women that “at a certain age women should not return to college.” In that regard, nontraditional women in that class were not treated the same as their traditional female and male counterparts. Further, this woman also stated that she was surprised that the campus environment was so

inhospitable for the simple reason that it was a religious college. That was not at all what she had expected. However, this “chilly” campus environment did not deter her from successfully moving toward completing her goal of a college education. These three students acknowledged that for those who did not have a strong sense of self-worth, the institution could indeed silence their identities, racially and gender wise.

There were three other women in the community college category who expressed that they did not in anyway feel silenced within their institutional environment. They felt that being nontraditional women gave them an edge over other traditional female students inside and outside of the classroom. Yet, one of these women discussed that when she had attended the community college earlier, things were different for nontraditional students as well as for students of color. Further, she also reported that there is more diversity among staff and instructors and she had two Black professors who gave her a sense of security. In fact, she mentioned that the female Black professor has become her mentor, and that has made a positive impact on her self-esteem. She did not have any experiences with any type of silencing to her identity as a nontraditional Black female college student.

There was also one student in the four-year college category who did not in anyway feel that her identity was being compromised by her race, age, gender, or social class. Similar to the other women at the community college category, she felt that being a nontraditional student gave her an edge because she had overheard professors say how much they appreciated having nontraditional students. Thus, these four women all shared similar reflections about the issue of silencing.

Further investigation revealed that three Black students in the four-year private college category expressed their feelings of being silenced within the academy. They expressed that they did not so much feel silenced by their gender but by their race. One of the Black students said that she felt reluctant to express herself within the classroom because of her minority status; another said that she felt invisible, and the last woman mentioned that because the hostile environment impacted her sense of self-worth, she choose to be silent. They further discussed feeling this way inside and outside of the institution because of the segregation, isolation, alienation, and loneliness of being Black women within the institution. Also, they each discussed the fact that as nontraditional students they did not at all feel silenced but that from their perspectives, "race mattered." Each of these women made conscious decisions to remain silent and to simply "go along to get along" to get their grades and not made waves, but to just go with the "flow" and accomplish what each came to the institution to accomplish--finishing their college degree, even if it means doing it in silence.

In the community college category, there was another student who expressed feelings of silencing in regards to her identity as a Black woman. Again, like some of the other women mentioned above, she, too, did not feel that her identity as a woman was being compromised, but her identity as a Black person was being silenced within her educational environment. She expressed feelings of being in a hole or a box and no longer being willing to express her views openly in the classroom because she does not feel validated. Therefore, similar to the three Black women in the four-year college category, she, too, decided to remain silent and get her grade and complete what she set out to accomplish--to graduate with a college degree.

This investigation further revealed that there were more women in the private four-year college category who experienced silencing to their identities than in the community college setting. There was, however, one student in the community college category who reported feelings of isolation because of her race. Although there was another student in the community college category who reported race as an issue, she did not feel silenced because of her strong sense of self. Therefore, she did not choose to remain silenced within the institution; in fact, she articulated that no one could silence her even if they tried. In essence, there were some significant differences in the experiences of these ten women in this category. Totally, there were five women who felt silenced within their educational environment. Yet none of them let that interfere with them moving forward towards their goal--even if they had to do it in silence.

Five Black Female Students at the Community College – Question 5

What obstacles or barriers make an impact on your academic success (situational, institutional, dispositional)? Note: Within this question the participants discussed family and religious support.

The narratives revealed that three of the Black students in the community college category experienced situational barriers. Two students reported that they did not experience any type of situational barriers. Though Maya (26) is included as not having any current situational barriers, she reflects that she did experience a “serious” obstacle or barrier earlier when she attended college. She said that:

When I first went away to college after high school I experienced a very serious obstacle. I got pregnant at the beginning of my junior year, and it was like, Wow, this is really going to disappoint my parents. This was a serious thing and I didn't know how I was going to tell them. I consider myself blessed at this time because I really don't have any barriers or obstacles. I can balance the time between school, work, and family... Simply because I have support. My husband, my parents, and my siblings help with child care...If I need to study and my daughter

is home, my husband can contain her and keep her busy... I also feel that my prayer life and my belief in God provides me support and strength. It is the strength and faith in God that keep me grounded... If I put God first in my life, I can conquer all. I have had some hard times, and everything has not always been as they are now, and it's just that faith in God that keeps me focused and moving forward everyday.

On the other hand, the other student in the community college category who expressed that she really did not have any situational barriers with child care and those kinds of things had this to say. Esther (53) said:

I would have to say probably my friends (laughter). Some people are very negative about certain things. They were telling me "I wouldn't do that, go to school at your age. You are older and can't grasp a lot of things like those young people." I feel that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me... I try to phase other people out. I simply will not allow negativity to cloud what I want to accomplish... My parents are very supportive--much more than when I was younger because they wanted me to study what they wanted... Right now I don't have a husband. I am divorced. All I have to do, basically, is take care of me. Most women in my category have husbands, children, or grandchildren--someone they have to take care of. I am fortunate enough that I don't have those kinds of barriers right now. I don't have any barriers with my job because I am retired from my full-time employer, and my part-time position does not interfere with my attending school... My major support and focus comes from my relationship with God. I consider myself to be a spiritual person.

Of the three women, one was going through a divorce at the time of the interviews, which caused a lot of changes in the situational barriers she now faces. Natasha said that:

Finances is the largest barrier. At this time I am going through a divorce and I don't work. I have been a full-time student with the goal of completing my college education in the next two years. So overcoming financial challenges have been the biggest obstacle. I can't say that I have any major situational barriers, but since getting a divorce not only are there financial challenges, sometimes with my younger son, scheduling gets kind of difficult--my schedule with his. Sometimes it can be difficult trying to figure out how to schedule myself and my classes, you know, to make sure that I am there as the custodial parent and making sure that I am available... My oldest two children do help. They are very supportive. My mother helps out as far as baby-sitting and things like that. My son is ten... The family support is there, and I really don't have a tremendous amount of situational

issues. In other words, the situations that arise do not, in any way, hinder my being successful.

The narratives further revealed that the last two students in the community college category had similar, yet different, situational barriers. Of these two women, one discussed how her youngest child tries to pull at her heartstrings, which causes her to have some guilt feelings. Journey (38) said that:

Balancing home and school and anything else I might be obligated to do is the most difficult thing. I had to learn that school is just for a time. It is my time. I do struggle with guilt and a messy house... If my husband was not so supportive, I would experience a lot of situational barriers. I always tell people that if it were not for my husband, if it were not for God taking me through this process, I could not do what I do. My husband fills in the gap; he is very supportive... My fourteen year old daughter, when I was talking about quitting school, said to me, "Oh no Mom, you are going to finish." I get a lot of encouragement from her. My boys are eight and ten. I would say that my youngest would really like to see Momma at school. He really would... The two of us were walking through the hall of his school about two weeks ago. I had to see his teacher, and it's been a while since I had been to his school... As we are walking down the hall, he looks at me and said, "It has been quite a while since you have been here hasn't it?" I just wanted to – oh my heart, boy you know how to make your mom feel sad. He was just pulling those heartstrings... He looks up at me and said, "Mom this is what Mom's are for." I didn't know if I wanted to cry and hug him or say don't be pulling these tricks on me again. So I deal with those kinds of situations from time to time. I am determined. So, as far as situational barriers, my family's support helps to elevate their impact on me. But I do suffer from guilt feelings being from my younger children. I realize the hustle and bustle of class work and family that I forget to tap into my power source. I get strength through my faith and my belief in God. So by the grace of God, I am here completing my education.

The last Black student in the community college category also discussed that when she attended the community college earlier, she had one serious situational barrier or obstacle, the death of her mother. But presently, she is trying to balance home and school. Dionne (38) had this to say about her situational barriers:

Remember, I said earlier that I got married instead of going right on to college. Years later I tried my hand at going to college, but my mother got sick. So that was a serious barrier for me. So during my first semester back, my mom died and I ended up dropping out of college because I just couldn't concentrate. However,

at present, the only situational barrier I have is trying to balance home and school, especially on the weekends when my younger one has activities... So trying to balance everything can be a challenge. Basically, I just have to take control and not try to do everything myself and spread the responsibilities to other family members. Also, I have to learn to say no to friends and church family and get a grip on what it is I need to do for myself. My family is very supportive of me going back to school. If they did not support me and pick up the slack, I really don't think that I could do this. Education right now is the greatest things going on in our house. Everyone is in school, including my husband... So having that family support is very positive. The main phrase in our house right now is "Did you do your homework."

After reviewing the narratives on the institutional barriers, it was revealed that one Black student in the community college category expressed that she did not experience any institutional barriers. However, the other four women experienced a variety of institutional barriers. One of these women experienced only one barrier, while the other three women experienced from two to three different kinds of institutional barriers. Natasha (38) stated that:

Personally, I feel like I have been blessed. I haven't had any complaints or any issues with the institution, even with the counselors, and I have had two. The first counselor I had got sick and passed away within the past year. I got a different counselor this year, and she has been just as helpful; in fact, I think she may be even more helpful than the first counselor.

On the other hand, Esther (53) said that:

Since I have been back, I can identify two institutional barriers that make an impact on my success. The community college has fifteen-week classes, and there is one class that is a choir class. It is one credit, and they expect you to have fifteen weeks of that. That was a barrier to me because I felt like this was choir, not that it isn't important. What I am saying is, that's a lot of time for a one-credit class. That is one barrier. The other barrier I found is that I would like more Saturday classes... So as a nontraditional student, more weekend classes would benefit me in completing my degree sooner.

Another Black student in the community college category expressed that things have gotten better since she attended the community college earlier; however this was her first semester back. She also feels that having Black role models has also made a positive

impact on her overall experience. The fact that she has developed a positive mentoring relationship has given her the confidence she once lacked. Dionne (38) said that:

As far as institutional barriers, things have gotten better. There is more flexibility here. But it is a bit too early to tell. This is my first semester back since 1997. When I first came back it took me three weeks to register, and that was a very difficult and frustrating. I found that the cafeteria is too expensive. Everything appears to be a dollar too high. I know that this is college, but it is not a university, and I did not expect such high prices at this community college. It used to be that one side of the cafeteria area was very quiet and now there is a TV, and that is different. If you want quiet time you have to almost go to the library or in the faculty lunch area. However, the things I just mentioned does not hinder me from being successful. Overall, this is a good school, and I have been blessed this semester to have two Black professors who are genuinely concerned about me and that has really made an impact on me being successful.

Two Black students felt that their classroom environment was an institutional barrier, and one of these students also discussed some other institutional barriers that impacted her success. Maya (26) said that:

The only thing I can refer to at this institution... is that straight lecture does not work best for my learning style. I can read a chapter, and I have to read it twice before I can fully understand it, especially when the instructor just lectures. Sometimes the lectures do not go along with the textbook, and then I am totally confused. One professor lectured for three hours straight, and it was horrible. I did not have a clue what he was talking about. I sat and took notes and tried hard not to fall asleep. It is hard for me to learn in this kind of an environment. I need an active learning environment. So sometimes your learning environment can be a barrier to learning, growth and development. I am most interested in learning not, just memorizing...I value my education and take it seriously.

The other student discussed her classroom environment as a barrier in reference to race and how her race can be a barrier in the classroom setting. She reported on an instructor's attendance policy and how that has affected her successful completion of her program. Journey (38) maintained:

Being the only Black female or student of color in the classroom and the attitude of some of the instructors and students can make for a very uncomfortable learning environment, which from my perspective, can translate to an institutional barrier. When I do participate in the class, my thoughts and ideas are not taken

seriously due to the fact that I am Black. I am made to feel as though, “there she goes again, whining and complaining about Black issues.” Therefore, not having your thoughts validated by the instructors or students in the classroom setting can make things difficult and uncomfortable for me. I have accepted the fact that I will no longer participate and just sit in the class and do what I have to do to get a good grade and move on... The attendance policy of one instructors I had last semester was terrible; I was penalized for having a sick child at home, and I had to leave early. I mean as a nontraditional student life happens, but she had no sympathy... That has totally affected my schedule because I have one class left to take, and she is the only teacher teaching that class. I have made up my mind that I would drive wherever I had to just not to have her again as an instructor. She does not give you credit for being an adult and a grown woman with your own family. It was unbelievable.

A review of the narratives revealed that some of these Black students struggle with dispositional, self-imposed barriers. Of the five Black students in the community college category, only one student reported not having any dispositional barriers that impacted her academic abilities. Maya (16) said that:

I do not have any issues with my academic abilities, so the only dispositional barrier I suffer with is the guilt feelings. Sometimes I punish myself because I often wonder where would I be if I had not gotten pregnant. I had this ten-year plan when I got out of high school, and it reflected what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be in ten years. When I became pregnant, I was so depressed and disappointed with myself that I had to seek professional care from my physician... I felt like a failure. So my getting pregnant was the biggest dispositional barrier I had to deal with, and I felt that it did make an impact on me completing my education on schedule. So in a way, that affected my educational success.

The other three Black students in the community college category reported that their dispositional barriers centered around their academic abilities, and one of these women discussed being intimidated by younger students. They discussed these dispositional barriers as being the most serious or the biggest barriers that they have had to face in continuing their education. Another woman in this category discussed not only her academic abilities but issues of low self-esteem that also impacted her. One of the three women, Esther (53) had this to say about her dispositional barriers:

I think that the dispositional barrier makes the biggest impact on me. My feeling is that I can't do this because I have been out of school so long. I get kind of intimidated when I am around the younger people. Not that my mind isn't alert or focused; it takes a little longer, and those young people are so quick. Sometimes I am intimidated in that way. But the younger people are respectful of me and will try to help me.

Dionne (38) considers her dispositional barrier as her most serious obstacle. She noted that:

Right now if I had to pick the most serious obstacle or barrier it would have to be me. Just get me out of the way and stop judging myself and not freezing up and being fearful of being in school at my age. It makes the biggest impact, so I have to continually work at having a positive attitude and don't let the negativity creep in. I have to just keep plugging at it and for me not to hammer myself. If I do this successfully, then I will not hinder my ability to be successful. But if I let the negativity creep in, it can take over my thinking, and I won't be able to do anything. So that has been a big challenge for me. Even though I have experienced academic success I am still plagued with feelings of self-doubt.

Journey (38) reported similar sentiments about her dispositional barriers:

I do suffer with disposition barriers. I constantly have to tell myself that I can do this. I can be academically successful. I am very concerned about my academic abilities because it has been decades since I've been in school, and when you do not use something on a regular basis, you tend to lose it, or it takes a whole lot more to bring it back. That's why it took me so long to come back. I have done well and have received some good grades. For the first two years here at the college I have made the President's List and the Dean's List. Making those list, did a lot for my self-esteem and made me feel really good.

Natasha (38), the last female student in the community college category, describes her dispositional barriers in the following manner:

I think that my biggest barrier comes from those that are self-imposed. One of the main reasons that it took me so long to come back was the fact that I was battling with drug addition and things like that. That has been a major barrier and the fact that I suffer from low self-esteem. You know, I'm just wondering if I am cut out to do this. I feel like I am being lead to do this, and I constantly wonder if I am really able to do it. This kind of thinking really is hard on me, and I do struggle with these kinds of thoughts about my abilities. I am in recovery. I just recently stopped seeing a therapist, but she is on call. The counseling was more for me personally and dealing with trying to learn to love myself, you know, because I never knew how to do that, to love myself. I believe that my relationship with

God helps me to get a grip on myself and what it is I want to accomplish. So when I am feeling shaky inside, I have to rely on my faith in God to get me through the tough times. So I consider myself spiritual and not religious, and I see that it is a big difference. That is my foundation. That is where my strength comes from when I don't have any strength.

Five Black Female Students at the Four-Year Private College – Question 5

What obstacles or barriers make an impact on your academic success (situational, institutional, dispositional)?

The narratives of the five Black nontraditional female students in the four-year college category revealed a variety of responses. The narratives of one student in this category revealed that she appeared not to have any situational barriers that made an impact on her educational endeavors. The other four women did have various situational barriers that impinged on their educational lives. Two of these five students experienced death of a loved one while attending college. Each handled their loss differently. Two women discussed having financial situations and working around their children and the difficulties that comes with being parents. One of these women is a single parent and notes the impact that limited family support makes. Of the two women who experienced death of loved ones, Meleka (40) had this to say about that particular situational barrier.

A situational barrier for me was when my Mom was sick and eventually died. That was very difficult for me, and it did make an impact on my education, but academically I did not suffer. It was hard to focus on my studies. I felt like I was just going through during that time. I think that if my husband was not a strong support system for me, and a good father to our sons--you know what I am saying. Here's a new family and we worked on one accord and I think by him being a strong Black man and being very supportive of me, I didn't have to worry about anything. Again, my husband and children are supportive and they are making a financial sacrifice because my husband had to take out loans to finance my education... I truly believe that without God and the encouragement from my mom, and prayer, I could not stay focused on this goal. My Mom was quite a woman. She was such a strong support for me. My siblings are also supportive, and my one sister is very encouraging. To sum it all up, my strong spirituality, family background, and my family support is everything to me. My faith in God

and how my Mom raised me and drawing my strength from her strength and wanting my children to know that this is something that they too can accomplish.

The other student in the four-year college category also experienced a death of a loved one while she was attending this institution.. This most serious situational barrier left such a scar that she was emotionally forced to drop out of her academic studies.

Sylvia (45) reflected on her loss in the following quote:

I remember that I was going to take a summer class one semester and had enrolled. It started the first week in August. That next weekend my brother died. I can remember coming here that Saturday morning and sitting in the class, and I don't remember what happened to me, but I couldn't stay. And I did not come back to school... Matter of fact, I ended up paying for classes because I didn't even think about dropping the class. It was not until a couple of years ago when I came back... I didn't even realize that I was gone that long... Something within just killed me; I just couldn't do it right then. I sat out for about three years... At present, the only situational barrier I have is having to work and sometimes I not only have to work two jobs, but all this semester I worked three jobs. I like to shop for whatever the reason. Fortunately, I don't have any children at home anymore. My family is so very supportive in what I am trying to accomplish. I have an excellent support system. I am First Generation College and I was the little girl who messed up. So this is for all of my family, especially my Mom... I am a Christian and I believe in God, and I know that without those mornings with Him, I could not have done it. I could have had all of this other support, but I think, for all that I believe and all that is within me, that God is so good and He enables me to do all the things that I ever wanted to do. He does, Lord thank you... I was out of work for a year with no health insurance, and I could have been sick, but God took care of me. He made sure that I got here, and that is important in what we do as well.

Two of the women in the four-year private college have children and they commented on the impact that it makes on their quality of time to study. Also, they each discussed financial issues which impacted on them personally and educationally. One of these women has a strong support system, and the other woman does not. Sarah (26) shared the following reflections:

I think that the most serious was when I was put on academic suspension and I lost my financial aid and was told that I had to pay for twelve credit hours out of pocket before I could receive aid again. That has been the hardest thing I have had

to contend with. You see, my daughter got really sick, and I could not really study, so I didn't do very well. It was really difficult. At that time I was a single mom, and I didn't have the money to take more than one class. That was the hardest. Another main situational barrier that impacts me is the fact that I have small children, and there are so many demands. I have to cook, clean, do the laundry, do hair, and do homework with them. Those things are toughest. My husband is very supportive and helps out a great deal with the children, but my study time is limited. I am tired. I have four small children. I think that those have been the most serious situational barriers for me. But I have been blessed with a good support system. My mother encourages me and will help out with the children. My husband is very supportive with the kids. When I need to study, my husband keeps the kids occupied, and he quizzes me. My kids understand that I am in school, and I think that they are happy about that. They say, "Mom, you are in school like Ms. Smith" you know. They related it to someone they know who is a student teacher. So they do understand... However, I manage to get through each day and do what I have to do. I am determined to finish this time. I am close to graduating.

One of the other Black students in the private college is a divorced single parent, and her situational barriers are varied. Further, she did not discuss having any type of support system that could have eliminated some of her frustrations. Ophelia (37) summarized her situation as follows:

Presently, the most difficult part is financially trying to make it and working two and sometimes three jobs to make ends meet. For now, financial pressures make it difficult, but I don't let that hinder my success. There have been some rough situations sometimes. There will be times my daughter would have a long day at school, then I pick her up and I would bring her here, and she would be here in the café. I would drag her to a four-hour class. Then I would take her to my third-shift job, and sometimes she would have to sleep on the floor. I would have to put a blanket on the floor for her. I would have to wake her up at six o'clock in the morning, and we would go home, get ready for school, and start all over again. But she is so strong that she understands that she has to make a lot of sacrifices along with me. This is my second year, but the first year I started here, there were many times that I would open the cabinets and there would be no food (nervous laugh). The bills are being paid, but sometimes there was no food... Another situation I deal with is having adequate time to study. I would study on the toilet, in my car, at my daughter's cheerleading practice, wherever I could; I would not waste a moment... The last situational barrier which may sound funny, is that friends, other people, and even family can be a barrier. I don't care what others say, I have come this far, I know that I can do it. So, that in itself is a situational barrier--trying to work against others who try to discourage me from following

my dream of a college education. But I have had to eliminate certain people out of my life.

The last Black student attending the four-year private college believed that her race has been her biggest situational barrier. From her perspective, that is the only situational barrier impacting her academic experience. Lori (35) noted the following:

My most serious obstacle has been my color and having to prove myself--having to prove that I can do it, that because I am Black, I am capable. That is basically it. Even with all of the other obstacles that I have had to overcome in my life, my color is by far the biggest obstacle. Even with trying to overcome the stigma of being Black, I stay focused on my dream of completing my education. I can be educated, not only for my job, but also for my own self and know that I was blessed with an education. That dream came back to me, because when I was a little girl at sixteen and having to work a job, I would be hurt; I was so jealous of the other girls. When I think of it, I can just cry (she starts to cry and sob). It really hurts. I had no one to lean on. Not one person in the school reached out to me to try and find out what was going on. No one cared. I had to support myself... I am married. I have a husband, and I am a foster parent. My husband and the boys are very supportive of me. The children are excellent; they are so proud of me. I am instilling in them that education is very important. My husband knows the reason I am doing this. I am the first in my family for five generations to get an education, and that is also pushing me. I pray a lot. I pray a lot to teach the kids I am working with and my own. I feel blessed, and I know that the Lord is with me and He's pushing me toward something, and that's why I stay in school as well. In conclusion, I do not have any other situational barriers; my husband is excellent, and my job does not interfere. I do not have any situations that make an impact on my schooling.

After reviewing the narratives for institutional barriers, three categories were revealed for the Black students attending the four-year private college. One of these categories is related to the college's structure: course schedule, as well as race, gender and/or age as an institutional barrier. One student reported how the college procedures can be a barrier. Another student reported how the college course schedule put her a year behind in her program. Three Black students reported how issues of race, age, and gender can be institutional barriers for nontraditional female college students. Sarah (26) made the following observation:

There are three institutional barriers that stick out in my mind. One that really impacted me was when I wanted to take two classes per quad, and I wasn't allowed to do that because they looked back and saw that I was put on academic suspension. They said that you now have four children, you are married and you work full-time; we recommend that you only take one class. I don't think that was fair. They should not be able to dictate to me what I can handle. Not being allowed to take two classes has stretched out my time in school... I do not like the parking because I take night classes, and you have to park so far away, and late at night, having to walk to my car, is not very comfortable. So I get a lot of tickets... Sometimes I get frustrated when I feel like the professor is expecting too much. You have to try to juggle everything at once. At times I think the instructors are being very insensitive, especially when you are taking a night class. I know that instructors have requirements, but I think that they should be sensitive that I can't do 30 things at the same time. One professor asked what we thought of the course and we did share our feelings, and he said that for the next class he would make some changes in his requirements... Other than that, I think everything else is going pretty well.

Sylvia (45) expressed that the course schedules could at times be constraining:

As far as institutional barriers, the one thing I didn't like is that when I would need a class, it sometimes wasn't offered – I would have been finished last May but I had to wait until the class was offered, and that pushed me all the way back another year. I think that is terrible. This institution doesn't offer things every semester so, therefore, if it is something you have to have and it's a requirement on your curriculum you have to wait until it is offered. You put your life on hold until they offer the next section of what you need. I think that's not good, and I'm not sure if that happens at all schools, but it is really bad here, really bad. A lot of things are offered during the day, and for nontraditional students we have to work. So that is a real hindrance when you can't get what you need when you need it. Other than not being able to take classes when I need them, I have not had any barriers with any instructors, counselors, or anything like that.

The last three women in the four-year private college category discussed the institutional barriers which impacted their experiences, such as, issues of race, gender/age, and the unfriendly environment as institutional barriers. Meleka said that:

From my perspective as a nontraditional student being here on the campus, I would have to say that the experiences of nontraditional men are a lot different from nontraditional women, especially White men. Again, this is from my perspective; I cannot speak for anyone else. This is a man's world... At the community college I attended, you had that support. But at this four-year private college, who are the tutors--the same students who looked down on me, so I'm not very well going to go to them for any support or help. Here it was a barrier

for me. It was very limiting, and the White students gave me a very uncomfortable feeling, they were not approachable, and not really open to help me... I think that this is something the school should work on-- making sure that all the students are treated with dignity and respect regardless of race, ethnicity, age and/or gender. Yes. I think so--teach students and teacher how to interact with all kinds of people and stress the importance of diversity and respect... Counselors were here, but I think for nontraditionals, the needs are much different than traditional students... For those of us who work, at times it is difficult to try to workout your schedule to meet their schedule. It was there but not adequate for nontraditional students... Because the environment for me was uncomfortable, I never put myself into situations that would stress me out. You know, so I kind of avoid many situations... I see the lack of interaction with traditional students, nontraditional students as a big institutional barrier. I really don't understand. You would think that because this is a religious institution the students would be more open and friendly. This is not a warm, friendly, spiritual environment. If you are going here to meet friends, especially people who look like me, you are in the wrong place. The lack of friendliness and the uncomfortable environment was a institutional barrier for me.

Ophelia (37) is another student who discussed racial isolation and invisibility as a institutional barrier. She said that:

Feeling like an outsider because of your race, I don't know if that would be considered a institutional barrier, but you get that feeling from the instructors and students. There is a separation. The minority students are like separate. Let me go back to the class setting. In the class setting it's like separated--I wish I knew how to exactly explain it, but from my perspective all minority students' it's a problem here. You see it with the lower grades. It's how the teachers and how they interact with minority students and how that has been an institutional barrier for me. Sometimes I don't feel comfortable, but I also am not going to let that hinder my success... No support groups for nontraditional students, well I don't have a problem with having men, but men don't seem to do as much. Women have to run the house, take care of the children, do the laundry and stuff like that. A support group would allow us an opportunity to meet and share with each other and help each other cope with some of the problems we face as nontraditional college students... Spiritually, I have to keep my personal relationship with God even when things are going bad, and sometimes this institution of higher education is not comfortable, but God gives me the strength to endure.

A review of Lori's (35) narrative revealed that she too experienced the institution as an uncomfortable place for women of color. She said that:

The isolation and alienation I have experienced is an institutional barrier. I was going to say the lack of interaction, but what I am really saying is my fear of

interaction because of the hostile environment in and outside of the classroom. Also, some of the issues I have with instructors are the fact that the instructors do not intervene on my behalf when I was participating in class... There was an incident where I had to get approval for the social science major from one of the counselors... When I went in the office it was completely empty. I had already given her my letter of interest about four or five months ago. She said to me that if people would stop coming into my office I could take care of this. I thought, Oh, so that's the only contact that I have had with a counselor, so I don't really deal with them. I just find my own way. So what I am saying is that the overall unfriendly environment has been a big barrier, and from my perspective, it all has to do with my color. But I just do what I have to do because I am determined to graduate. No one will hinder me from accomplishing that even if I have to do it in silence and on my own.

Dispositional barriers, including how each student felt about their academic abilities, were also present in the narratives. Of the five Black students in the four-year private college category, two reported that they did not have any dispositional barriers because of the success they have encountered. However, each mentioned that earlier when they first returned to college they had their doubts. According to Meleka (40):

To be honest, I really did not experience any dispositional barriers. The community college that I attended before transferring here really prepared me to be academically successful. If I had come here after being out of school for 20 or so years, I am sure I would have struggled. I was not a wonderful high school student. I basically was just pushed through because I was nice and did not cause any trouble. So, I am really glad that I went to the community college because that was where I received the nurturing and encouragement I needed to be successful here.

On the other hand, Sarah (26) felt doubtful because of the responsibilities she has with her family and being on academic suspension when she attended this private four-year college earlier. Sarah (26) had this to say:

I was nervous because I know that I have a large amount of responsibilities outside of school. I have responsibilities to my husband, my children and have a full-time job. But, by the grace of God, I have been able to maintain everything and keep good grades. So I don't seem to struggle with my abilities to do the work. I am confident in my academic abilities... Because I was on academic suspension, I want to do the best that I can, especially with them telling me that I

can only take so many classes. I feel that I have to prove something, so I think that I strive, and I set my goals real high because of that.

Lori (35), another Black student at the four-year private college, was the only student who was a high school drop out and noted how that factor affected her thinking in regards to her preparedness for college:

By me being out of school for so long and getting a GED, it was really fearful in the beginning because with a GED you don't really get to know your stuff. I mean they give you the basics, but you have to know other things. Like the biology classes I took where I had to struggle, so I just applied myself and worked hard. But I did have a little bit of fear coming to this four-year college knowing that it was a private school. But now because of the success I have had in school; from taking the GED exams and doing well, graduating with a 3.8 at the community college, I have no fears, not any nervousness. It's like there is nothing that I can't tackle. I have tackled it all. It's a piece of cake to me. I go into my classes positive, stay to myself and stay focused on accomplishing my goals, and I do it.

Another student believes that, even though she has experienced some academic success, she still struggles with feelings of not being adequate. Ophelia (37) reported the following:

Yes, I do have some problems with that, as far as being older, having more responsibilities being a single mother and working full and part-time. I knew I would be sacrificing a lot and making a lot of adjustments after being out of school for a few years. My GPA dropped the first semester. I thought that I was this really dumb person. I found that many of the instructors did not have much experience with students of color. I guess I could have added this statement in the section on institutional barriers. I did not expect to have problems with instructors not being able to deal with me because of my race. My writing – my first year I struggled with my grades... So I had lots of concerns about my academic abilities. Plus, I had to work very hard to overcome my own thinking--or negative thinking about myself. By the second semester, things were going well... Although now I do get B's and A's and no C's, I still struggle with feelings of self-doubt. Even if I do struggle with those feelings about my self-doubt, I am not going to let that stand in the way of my being successful. I have to just work harder at overcoming those feelings.

Sylvia (45), in her narrative, expresses how difficult it was for her to return to school because she was never a good student and, it was after the sixth grade that she

learned how to read. Therefore, she was scared and had a lot of dispositional issues and concerns. She said that:

Oh wow, yes. I had lots and lots and lots of concerns because I had never before been a good student. I was the student who did not learn to read until late, like after the sixth grade, and I just thought that I was this really dumb person... Remember that I was put out of the other institution on academic probation because I didn't know. So, I didn't think that I could do it. But once I got the courage to come back, I was concerned enough to get help. I worried everyone. The instructors will write on my paper "Watch your run on sentences," but they don't know that's all I know. So I had the fear of not being able to do or be competitive educational-wise with traditional students, or nontraditional for that matter. There are some good students here... I think that dispositional barriers have been the biggest for me. Not thinking that I could do it. More so than me not being able to do it, simply saying that I don't think that I can do it, and I was simply scared. That's been my hindrance.

Summary of the Ten Black Female Students – Question 5

Of the ten Black students attending a community college and a four-year private college, there were three women-- one in the community college category and two in the four-year private college category--that did not experience any situational barriers. One female student attending the community college has been divorced for several years, has no children and is presently retired and has no work constraints. The other two women are married, one with two foster children and one has a new blended family with five children. They expressed not having any issues because of very supportive husbands, as well as other family members assist them. With this support network, they do not in any way experience any type of situational barriers.

The other seven women all expressed having some type of situational barriers that impinge upon their schooling experience. One of the women in this category was somewhat unique in that she discussed having a serious situational barrier earlier when she got pregnant at the beginning of her junior year in college. But today, because of the

“wonderful” support her family provides--husband, parents and siblings--she no longer experiences any situational barriers that impact her college success. The other six women all presently experience situational barriers as they work to balance home, work and school. Of these six Black college students, five discussed having “wonderful” or “excellent” support from their families, husbands, siblings, etc. Many of them expressed that had it not been for their family support, they could not experience the success they have experienced. Yet, one of these students did not discuss any type of family support. She continually shared that on many occasions she would have to bring her daughter to school with her and at times would have to take her daughter to her third shift-job. So, it appeared that she was the only participant with either limited or no support. Also, she did not discuss having family support during the interview nor the focus group session.

There was only one student in the community college category who stated that she had no institutional barriers. However, the other nine women discussed a variety of institutional barriers that impacted their education negatively. One woman in the community college category expressed that the straight lecture format was a barrier to her growth and development. Further, she also stated that the “chilly climate” impacted her in how the students and teachers responded to her. However, she did not allow her peers and professors’ reactions impact on her success. Also, four other women--one in the community college and three in the four-year private college category--felt that the hostile, separation, segregation, isolation and alienation, due to race, impacted them in very negative ways. Three of these five women chose not to actively engage or participate within the classroom setting. In essence, they chose to “go along to get along” – to get their grades and move on. Yet, two of these women--one in the community

college category and one in the four-year private college category--decided that regardless of the discomfort, they refused to silence their voices. A review of the narratives (interview/focus group) revealed that four of these ten women now have mentors and that factor was beneficial as they used their mentors as a buffer between themselves and the negativity they experienced within their respective institutions

Five of the women--three in the community college category and two in the four-year private college category--discussed how college procedures and course scheduling had made a negative impact on their ability to complete their programs in a timely manner. One of these women also complained about the high cost of the college cafeteria food. In sum, the Black students in the four-year private college category experienced a campus environment that was considerably more "chilly" and "hostile" than that of the Black students in the community college category.

In the dispositional barrier category, four of the ten Black students discussed not having any dispositional barriers. Although all of them stated that when they returned to college earlier, they did experience some apprehension because they had been away from the educational arena for a number of years. However, now they do not experience any type of "fear" or "anxieties." They were all totally comfortable with their ability to succeed and reach their goals. There were a total of six women who presently "struggle" with dispositional barriers--two students in the private four-year college category and four in the community college category. In fact, these six women voiced that self-imposed, dispositional barriers had more of an impact on them than the other barriers--situational or institutional. For some of these six women, even though they are academically successful, self-doubt still exists because of their past academic

experiences. Yet, neither of them allowed these negative feelings to so overwhelm them that they gave up on their goals of acquiring a college education. Their commitment to accomplishing their goals and to prove to themselves and others that they can be successful outweighs their anxieties.

The narratives revealed that all ten of these Black women are spiritual and that their personal relationships with God provide them with the strength and encouragement they need to stay focused on realizing their long awaited dreams of a college degree. Also, the narratives revealed that neither of these ten Black students were specifically asked the questions about their religious or spiritual support. That information was freely given without any prompting. Interestingly, they all shared the same scripture “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). In sum, there were more similarities than differences in the experiences of these ten Black college students. Regardless of the many obstacles and barriers discussed by the ten women, they were unwilling to let anything deter them from accomplishing their goals.

Five White Female Students at the Community College – Question 1

Briefly describe your high school experiences.

The narratives of the five White students in the community college category revealed that no one had a “very positive” or “positive” high school experience. Three of these women had experiences which could be categorized as “negative,” or, in their words, “not good” experiences because they did not have any type of support and encouragement inside or outside of school. Also, it was revealed that the negative experiences of these women were due in part to family issues, class issues, and/or gender issues. One student dropped out because she was not a good student, and education was

not encouraged either in school or in her family. Janet (41) is a first generation American and believed her ethnicity could have been a factor why she felt different from her peers. Also, the impact of her family situation was at the center of her negative schooling experience. She commented as follows:

High school was not a good experience for me. I graduated in 1977. Basically the reason it was not a good experience for me was the way I grew up in my house. I was raised in a strict Dutch family, and there were language barriers. My parents were immigrants, and I am a first generation American, student ... I always felt that I was different from everybody. I was scared to death of everything. You know, I remember walking up to the classroom and sweating like crazy and knees shaking, and I remained that way throughout high school... There were no teachers or anyone who reached out to me... I guess it could have been that I was afraid to talk to people, and that stemmed from being younger and not really being able to even understand my situation myself... My household was not a very nice household, and my father--it was like there were always secrets you know, and I kind of learned not to talk because of that... So I had no support in school or outside of the school. I never talked to mom because she cried a lot, and I never had anyone to talk to... When you are living in a controlled environment, how can you get mentoring when there are secrets and you had to be quiet. We were not allowed to talk, period... I was so messed up as a result of the way I grew up and everything. When I was sixteen, I started drinking a lot. I did that to feel better. I tried to escape. I was just too messed up to even think about high school, let alone college. I wasn't ready, so I said "just screw it."

None of the women in the community college category experienced any type of positive mentoring, support, encouragement or guidance. Therefore, three of these five women developed feelings of low self-esteem and a flawed sense of self-worth. This lack of positive support, was evident in Samantha's (26) negative high school experience. She said that:

My high school experience was not good. I was average as far as grades go. I probably could have done better, but the teachers always told me that I was average. So I got my C and I was done. Home wasn't too good either, so that probably made an impact... I did not feel accepted because by the time I was in high school, I was really overweight and really quiet and because of other situations, I did not want to stand out... All of the teachers would compare me to

my brothers. I had four older brothers, and I was considered the dumb one. My brother is a year younger than me and he had the same teacher the period before me. The teacher would pick on me before the whole classroom, and would say, "Your brother got an 'A' on this same quiz and he would sleep through movies and still get an 'A'" So school was not a good experience for me.

Desire (48), the oldest White female student in the community college category, was one of two students who dropped out of high school. She expresses why she dropped out of high school. She said:

I wasn't a very good student in high school. I dropped out at the end of the 11th grade and didn't graduate. Instead, I got married to a young man I knew from high school who was home on leave and heading for Europe. I was supposed to graduate in 1971, but in 1975 I decided to finish my education so I could join the Army. I took adult education classes along with other soldiers. I ended up graduating from Kaiserslautern American High School in West Germany... During the time I was growing up, young women were manicured to become housewives, and education was not a priority. You were encouraged to take home economics so you could cook and sew. Therefore, I never thought about going to college or if it was even an option.

American culture's emphasis on an equalitarian democracy leads many to believe that the U.S. is a classless society, and all who work hard can achieve the American dream. However, one of the narratives revealed that this popular assessment is incorrect, as illustrated by Candie (40):

...Neither at my old school or the new school were there any teachers or counselors there to inspire or encourage me to continue my education. I wish I could say there were, but there were teachers who made me feel more like I wasn't smart enough, and then there were people telling me that I was... I did not think at that time that my gender was a big issue as much as not being from the right economic group. I think that had an influence... I think that I noticed right away that the kids who came from the good neighborhoods were automatically thought to be the good students. So those of us who came from the other side of the railroad tracks were expected to be challenges... They stratified students based on class and how much money your parents had... I think that for some reason, people assume that if you come from a family that has a high income, that automatically means higher education... I always felt in high school that all I was expected to do was to just find a good job. No one ever told me I could go to college. I never heard that from anyone. My mother was the only one who said that she wished I could go to college, although she didn't imply that I could. I

think she realized that we were in a financial situation. My parents divorced when I was a senior in high school and my mother was on welfare and attempting to raise my younger sister and myself. I graduated in June of 1978. I turned eighteen in July, and I got married in August. I was married for six years, then I was divorced and then I lived on my own for eleven months and remarried and have been married for the last fifteen years.

The last White student in the community college category had quite an unusual or unique educational background. Her narrative revealed that she did not attend high school; therefore, she could not describe what high school was like for her. In her own voice, May (44) shared the following experience:

Well mostly I didn't go. I quit in elementary school because I was in a deep depression, and when the school bus would come, my knees would shake. I was so frightened; I was phobic and I had a really bad experience. One year I was in a program that they claimed would help me with my depression, but it turned out to be an abusive program, and it wasn't quite for me... After being in the program for over a year, I was sent to a public middle school, and I had less than one year there... I felt like I was invisible because I wasn't from a typical home environment; I was living in an institutional setting... They were experimenting--that's what they were doing--and my parents thought that they were therapists and were going to help me deal with my depression. I was depressed, and when I was in school they didn't know what to do. My parents were going through a divorce, and they made the program sound wonderful. So I wanted to go because they said that they would treat me like a family... It was not pleasant. I didn't really count in my mind... I quit when I was twelve and we moved to Canada... When I was fourteen I started working in a factory and moved in with a friend because my parents were moving to Chicago. I had lived separate from them for so long and that I thought, well, I guess I'll get married, and that's what I did. I had a very different early educational experience, so sometimes I have a hard time trying to explain or talk about that experience... I surrounded myself with books and taught myself and trained myself. I tried to get financial aid for college, and they told me I needed a GED. I did that. I love learning.

The narratives revealed that these nontraditional female students experienced a variety of high school experiences--very positive to very negative.

Five White Female Students at the Four-Year Private College – Question 1

Briefly describe your high school experience.

Of the five White students in the four-year private college category, only one student expressed having a “very positive” high school experience. One was listed in the “positive” category, while two others said that their high school experiences were neutral or just “average.” The last female in the four-year private college category had a negative high school experience; in fact, she said that she “hated” high school. It appeared that for four of these White students issues of class and gender were inevitable cause and effect factors that influenced their high school experiences. For one student, gender bias could have been the reason she was not encouraged to move forward with her education. According to Alexandria (48):

It’s hard to remember what high school was like because it was such a long time ago. Mostly what I liked to do was history and English. I hated the sciences, and I hated math. I hung around a group of religious kids, which was cute because they were a bunch of Baptist kids, and I was the only Catholic in the group... I was not encouraged to go to college, not so much back then. I graduated in 1970, coming out of the 1960s and all that... And because I was a girl, I was not expected to go to college. I was not encouraged to go. So my experience was OK, I only remember one English teacher who insisted I should take honors English; she was wonderful. The class was more literature, so you could get into the books and just have fun with it. She was the only teacher who took any type of interest in me, and she didn’t encourage me to go to college.

The other student expressed that high school was just high school and that it was important for her to belong. Therefore, because of her class status, belonging was her major focus. Leslie (41) observed:

It was party time. I didn’t get a whole lot of studying in high. I didn’t really care; I just wanted to have fun. I didn’t have a whole lot of friends. I wanted to. I don’t think I wanted to be popular, I just wanted to be accepted. I guess we didn’t have a lot of money, so the most important thing to me was to have fun. I didn’t learn a whole lot in high school because I never studied. The only time I would study was before a test. My dad didn’t have anything to do with us being raised—he worked and he drank and that’s what he did. My mom took care of us, and by the time I grew up and went to high school, I think she just wanted to be done. She didn’t ignore me or anything; she just let me do my own thing, and studying wasn’t one of them... During the time I was in high school, I did not have anyone to

encourage me. No mentors, no one that even told me that I had any potential. Basically, they just left me alone. I saw people who were more outgoing and more popular who had those mentors, and that's how it was... Now that I look back, those people that were pushed had a whole lot more money than we did... I always knew we didn't have a lot and that other people had more than we did, but I never, I guess I never, thought about it like that before. So maybe my class status did make a difference in my high school experience.

It seemed that being popular can at times equate to a "very positive" high school experience, and this observation was seen in Sharon's (44) narrative. She said that:

My high school experience was very positive; it was my focus. You know, I was a cheerleader, the good girl who did everything right, except when it came to academics. I would sluff off. It was not a priority; if I got a C that was good enough. But I knew my parents would be happy with a B, so there was not a lot of motivation there. It was just not a priority; my priority was having fun and being socially accepted, and from then on just getting a job and making a lot of money. And that was also the focus of my parents, and even to this day they do not value a college education. Because I was not encouraged to go to college, I went right to work... I then started working for the Telephone Company, and I absolutely hated it, but the pay was good... I found myself in a crisis--who am I and what am I going to do... I ended up joining the military which really threw my family into a fit. I was the little one everyone had to protect and all of a sudden there I was making such a big step, and it threw them into chaos and into crisis... They were in shock, and they had no idea how to react, and they were totally upset with what I had done. I had no encouragement for college, but I encouraged myself to join the service.

The last White student in the four-year private college category further illustrated how class can play a pivotal role in the encouragement students receive from home and from school. Amy's (35) narrative reveals the impact her class location, as well as religious background, had on her high school and continuing education experiences:

High school was a good experience for me. I enjoyed it. I didn't have a lot of encouragement – my mother was older and never finished junior high and my grandmother lived with us and thought that "what do you need to go to college for" and that type of thing. So I didn't get the encouragement and that from home, but my mom wanted me to finish high school and all of that. But she wasn't ever willing or able to help--you know with homework and stuff like that. Other than that mentoring, I didn't have much encouragement. But some of my teachers did encourage me a little bit about going to college. I did go to a Bible College in Mississippi for a couple of semesters. But, that was strictly through our church so

it wasn't anything I could necessarily use anywhere in the real world (light laughter)... But that's how it was when I was growing up; it was never like "are you going to college?" and "what are you going to study?" It wasn't a big deal.

Summary of the Ten White Female Students – Question 1

The high school experiences of the ten White students matriculating at a community college differs significantly from those attending a four-year private college in that there was a progression of experiences from "very positive" to "very negative." Of the five students in the community college category, none of them had either "very positive" "positive" or "average." high school experiences. All five of the women clustered around the "negative/not good" high school experiences. In the four-year private college category, however, there was one student in the "very positive" category, one in the "positive" category, two in the "average" or "neutral" category, and one female student in the "very negative" category.

Although the narratives revealed that these women experienced a diversity of experiences in high school, ranging from "very positive" to "very negative," the experiences of nine of these women were similar and could have been influenced by either gender bias or class bias, or both. That some women were not encouraged to go on to college was due largely to the era in which they were socialized. Further, their social class, location, and the fact that they were first-generation college students made an impact on their overall high school experience, regardless if that experience was "very positive" or "very negative." It appeared that their gender and social class impacted their ability to establish positive mentoring relationships. It was also apparent that their social and/or gender affected their ability to receive the kind of encouragement that could have

altered their positions as nontraditional students. This factor was consistent for nine of the ten White students.

The lack of mentoring or guidance appeared to impact all of the women, as they all expressed the fact that they did not have mentors who specifically encouraged them to seek higher education. Nor did anyone provide any type of support or encouragement to them to work at meeting their full academic potential. Only those students who appeared to be from middle-class families with educated parents received that type of support. This was consistent even for those who said that they had “very positive” or “positive” high school experiences.

Of these ten White students, there were two women in the community college category who had specific family issues that resulted in feelings of low self-esteem and self-doubt. Their family issues also impacted their high school experiences in a negative way. There was another student in the community college category who suffered with problems of depression, so much so that she actually did not have much of a high school experience. However, she continued to learn and educate herself until she decided to get her GED so she could move forward in her life. In brief, there was no one in the four-year private college cohort with comparable experiences. In sum, although the ten White students lacked mentoring, support, and encouragement, each of them transcended those limitations and constraints and continued to pursue their education. It is now their turn to do things their way and for themselves.

Five White Female Students at the Community College – Question 2

What motivational factors determined your return to college?

The narratives revealed that there were primary and secondary factors that motivated the five White students in the community college category. These motivational factors can be categorized into four primary areas: change career, quality of life, doing this for myself, and the need for credentials. There were also five secondary motivational factors: convenience, environment, cost effectiveness, classroom size, and employer reimbursement. There was only one student who indicated that she was moved to attend college because of two primary motivational factors: to change careers and do this for herself. Janet (41) shared the following:

I needed to do something for myself. I needed a change because I was heading once more towards destruction. Okay, let me explain. I returned because I had a career for the last twelve or thirteen years. I was a stay-at-home mom until my daughter started first grade and I started working part-time at a restaurant... I could never say no, so in a year I was managing the restaurant... So I pushed and pushed because I had this opportunity for the first time in my life that I was the top dog... I never, never said no. I got to the point where it was almost like my career was an addiction... I had quit the alcohol when I was twenty-one. It was like I couldn't stop... I got the company car, tons of money, and I did that for seven months, and I started wondering what was I doing... I had an uncle that was dying, and I think that was what made me start looking at my life. I had all of these material things. I am not happy; I am miserable. Then I went into depression and started drinking after nineteen years... I knew the first thing I had to change was the career. It wasn't good for me. This is the first time in my life that I am doing something from my heart. I have always put what I wanted aside. I thought I was doing what I enjoyed. I was miserable. I am actually doing something that I am looking forward to everyday. So that was my motivational factor to get back to school... Plus it is time to do something just for me.

There was another student who was also motivated to do something for herself, Candie (40) said:

When my mother died, I realized that I had taken on the role of taking care of her. I was her caretaker for probably ten or fifteen years. I guess I decided that after she passed that I needed to spend time on myself, and I really hadn't been doing that. Actually, after watching the Oprah Winfrey show that really made me want to go back to college and get an education... I think that one of the things I realized is that I wanted to focus on grief counseling and maybe help someone else... Because the community college was close to me, I thought, why not and I

had been out of school for so many years. I also needed the small classroom and the intimate environment. So that's what motivated me to go get an education. It is strictly my time to do something for myself.

Samantha's (26) narrative revealed that she was the only single parent in the community college category. She realized that in order to care for her daughter and provide a quality of life for her, she needed to move beyond her insecurities and get a college education:

I tried college after high school graduation, and I could not make myself go through the door. I would just sit in my car and look at the college. I felt inferior, really dumb and ugly and that everybody would laugh at me, and I just couldn't open the car door... But being a single mother I had to make some changes and decisions in my life as to what was I going to do. So I decided that I had my daughter, and I wanted to be able to provide her with a better life. So that was the biggest motivational factor for me returning to college. Plus, the community college was close to home, and it was cost effective, and it is not as big as a four-year university. I was not quite ready to go to a big college.

The last two White students in the community college group realized that in order to reach a certain level professionally, they needed the appropriate credentials. Both of these women realized that, in today's society, in order to move forward in their careers, a four-year college degree was imperative. Desiree (48), the oldest student in this category said that:

I started back to school in 1977 as a full-time student at this community college because I realized that I needed more education to get a better job... I began thinking I wanted to be a secretary, so I started taking secretarial courses, and I ended up getting a job here. I went from the library to stockroom, and now I am an employment specialist... What has occurred is I had a promotion to this level, and I am no longer a secretary, and my employer will now pay for me to move forward towards my degree, and I plan to take full advantage of that option. So that was also a motivational factor for me to get back into school.

May (44) was the only White student in the community college category who dropped out of school between ages twelve and fourteen. May expressed that:

I would have to say that you couldn't get anywhere or get a decent paying job without an education. You can learn the job, which I did without a college degree, but they stopped me from progressing because I didn't have the degree. I always read and have always had a full library, and I never stop educating myself. I was totally committed to that even at fourteen when I eventually quit, but I came back so I could get the paper. What happened was that where I was working, everyone that was hired didn't workout. I asked if I could just stay in there and fix the program--an adult program--because everyone had bombed and left. I did, and I had the program up and running within two weeks. I had full classes and everything, did counseling under the licensed psychologist, and when she left, the new person was furious and didn't look at anything that I had done... She made my life miserable, and I knew that I would always be at risk with people like that. So I had to get credentials to have credibility... Secondly, the community college was convenient; it was so close, and the environment was beautiful--beautiful gardens and grounds. And that was important for me.

Regardless if their reasons consist of primary and/or secondary factors, these women were all motivated to return to college in hopes of fulfilling specific goals which consist of, but not limited to changing careers, enhancing their quality of life, or the need for credentials. What stood out among these reasons was the fact that these women were all interested in self-satisfaction—doing something and continuing their education for themselves

Five White Female Students at the Four-Year Private College – Question 2

What motivational factors determined your return to college?

Several primary and secondary motivational factors were revealed for the White students in the four-year private category. Primary factors included quality of life, doing this for myself, career change, tuition reimbursement program, and the need for credentials. The secondary factors consisted of convenience of college, classroom size, adult education program, and tuition reimbursement program. In this context, two women were motivated to do something for themselves. One of these women also

realized that she needed credentials in order to move forward in her career. Her church provided a tuition program; therefore, she decided to give education a try. Sharon said:

First of all, I wanted to do something for me. My children were in school all day. I had two sons, and my youngest must have been close to high school, and he was like in the 7th or 8th grade. The job that I was in at that point was just coordinator of the elementary programs, and I didn't really have any credentials to hold that position. I found that just for myself and for my own creditability within the community, I wanted to do that. And that high school thing about not being academically successful stuck with me. Another reason is that all tuition is paid, the college is fairly convenient, and you are not a number, you are an individual, and you really feel as though you matter and you are valued. I always felt nurtured and encouraged. I probably still wouldn't be going today if it weren't for that factor.

In many respects, it is a common thought for nontraditional women to want to accomplish something for themselves after their children matured. They begin to focus on goals that they had set aside until the families were less demanding. Alexandria (48) is another student in the four-year private college cohort who suspended or delayed her educational inspirations. Also, today she realizes that her class status also played a role in why she did not attend college after high school. She said that:

Well, it is my time to do something for me and to do something different. I wanted to go to college, but with my family dynamics you have to work. In my family you were never expected to go to college. We were a lower-middle class factory-working family. In fact, out of the three kids, I was the only one to graduate high school. So it wasn't expected... In my junior and senior year, I got this job at the telephone company because my mother worked there... once you get a good job it's like you're stuck... In fact, I have worked for that company for over thirty years. It's been nice, but it is coming to a close for me and that it's done... I saw this announcement in my church bulletin about this college, and I decided to explore it further... My company pays one hundred percent. I always wanted to see if I had a brain left after working thirty years... I wanted to try something; I wanted to try it and see if I could.

Quality of life was another primary motivational factor that was revealed in the narratives for one woman in the four-year college category. With reference to class, many individuals never give up hope of someday "being somebody." And this factor was

also evident in Leslie's (41) narrative. She was the only participant who expressed a present interest in improving her quality of life, and she was the only student in this category who listed secondary motivational factors for attending college. Leslie said:

Presently, my reason for returning is that I was divorced and I needed to do something with my life. I needed a career; I needed to be able to do something so I could take care of my child and myself. Plus, this campus is so close to my home that I can drive back and forth with no problems. However, when I first attended college right out of high school, I wanted to be something more than what the rest of my family was. They're all good people; they just had mediocre jobs. Nobody ever went to college. I just wanted to be special.

For Amy (35) her employers' tuition reimbursement plan had increased, and she believed that it was time to prove to herself and others that she could do it. Regardless of her class background, she would earn a degree. She said that:

My employer provides tuition reimbursement... was bumped up to \$2500... And I said you know money is available and I never really had the opportunity to go before because we didn't have the finances to even think about paying for it. So the opportunity is here, and I should at least try it, and I can take a class. If I do really bad and I don't like it, I don't have to keep going, but at least try it because the money is there. I am the only one in my family to really try to go to college and make that attempt to get a degree, which means that I am a first generation college student. I think that is part of it and to show that here's a kid that came from a house where her dad died when she was three months old, living on social security. I didn't come from a well-to-do family, but I survived... That kind of encourages me to keep going. It's like you want to keep going just to prove to yourself that I can do it.

Many of the nontraditional female students attend college off and on until they can decide what it is they want to accomplish. This observation was found in Beth's (40) narrative. She voiced that:

I actually have kind of a winding road to this because I actually went back not that far the following year after I completed high school, and went part time to the community college and tried to find something that I would like. And then I quit going and went back again when I was twenty-four. I got my two-year degree for drafting, and I graduated when I was twenty-seven. It took me three years. When I first went back when I was twenty-four, I was so tired of working three part time jobs to make my share of the rent, and I knew that I couldn't live like that. But

now I have been working for this drafting company for eleven years and I came back here four years ago because I am tired of what I am doing. I have to have a four-year degree to do anything, and it's time for a change.

Summary of the Ten White Female Students – Question 2

Of the ten White students, there were four who expressed that one of their primary motivational factors for returning to college was to do something for themselves. Of these four women, two were interested in changing their careers. One wanted to have a degree for “creditability.” Also, there were three other students who were motivated to attend college because they realized that in order to move beyond their present positions, a four-year college degree was necessary. There were a total of four female students who received partial or full tuition reimbursements from their employers, and that was the main reason for them to pursue their college education.

There were only three students in the four-year private college category whose narratives revealed that they were also motivated to pursue higher educational goals because they wanted to fulfill a dream deferred. Because of their class status, they wanted to prove to themselves that they can be successful academically; they can move beyond the status of their families and be “special” or to be “somebody.” A careful review of the narratives of the ten White students did not reflect any major or significant differences in the motivational factors to attend college. Their motivational factors were consistent across both institutional settings.

Five White Female Students at the Community College – Question 3

Describe your experience in the classroom setting and discuss which classroom environment works best for your learning style.

The White students in the community college category described their classroom settings as having a facilitation/open format or the traditional lecture format where the professor has complete autonomy. Further, it was revealed that four of the female students in this category preferred to be educated in a more facilitative environment where they could be more involved and expressive. They preferred having the opportunity to use their experiential knowledge as a bridge to understanding the subject matter. One student, however, preferred a more traditional lecture format where she can glean the knowledge from the professor. Desiree (48) made the following comment:

I believe that the professor has the appropriate knowledge and lecture is the best environment for my learning style. I do value experiential learning and working in groups; however, there is a certain level of anxiety when it comes to small groups because I have a difficult time expressing what I am thinking and it comes out unintelligently. That is one thing I am working with because I also teach employability skills. My instructors do encourage and respect participation; it is just that you don't feel comfortable expressing yourself. But, I do prefer a more lecture format because it is more structured learning.

The women who prefer a facilitative classroom format believe that this type of learning environment allows them to learn and grow and develop beyond the constraints of their prior socialization. In other words, not to be silent but to use their experiences as a pivotal part of the learning process. Janet (41) indicated that she was not allowed to speak when she was growing up; thus, she valued those classes which allowed her to use her own voice:

This semester I have two classes, and in the sociology class I have a chance to speak and share my experiences. I felt a lot of respect the first day I walked into that class. It's a very good atmosphere, and I believe that it has a lot to do with the professor. She sets the stage and makes it an environment that encourages learning and growing. Because of the way I grew up, this class meant so much to me; it gave me a chance to speak. At 41 I am learning that it is okay to use your own voice, and the professor encourages that. I have had a chance to share and talk about my ethnicity, and in turn, I began to learn and understand more about myself. The experience in that class was really transforming. The other class was

different. It was mainly lecture, and I think that the expectations to participate are there, but I don't think that it is encouraged. In the sociology class it is encouraged, respected and expected... In regards to which environment I prefer, it would definitely be an environment where there is active involvement between the professor and the students. Engage each other in the learning process; that way if someone is not getting it, something that is said could spark understanding... That way it allows for those students to catch up and experience learning as well.

The narratives also revealed how an open accepting classroom environment can enhance the self-esteem issues of students who were afraid to go to college. This observation was evident in Samantha's (26) educational environment:

Usually I do not have instructors who expect anything from me. I'm just there in the class doing what I have to do. I have only had one professor, and she was my sociology professor, who created a very comfortable learning environment. No, I take that back. The first semester, I had an English teacher, and she was great too. So, during the years I have had college classes, there were only two instructors who encouraged, expected, and respected students to voice in their classes. In fact, the sociology instructor, had a way of making you feel taller. For some reason, I didn't feel dumb, but smart and I was able to even make sense out of my own life. Other than that class, instructors like everything black and white. This is what you need to know, period... I tended to learn more in the sociology class because it was active, and it allowed me to relate to my experiences... If I am made to feel comfortable and accepted, I would much rather prefer an engaged environment, because I really did learn a lot in that class. I mean I really grew. But if the environment is not comfortable, I would move toward lectures.

There was two other White students in the community college category who reported having "very positive" and "very negative" classroom experiences. Each of these women believed that because their professor was female, she provided them with environments that were nurturing and allowed them to learn beyond what they thought possible. According to Candie:

I would say that probably my female professors are definitely more approachable and open in their teaching/learning environments. I had two really bad experiences with two male professors. I thought that they were condescending and underestimated my potential dramatically. I definitely think that, because I was a female, I was not encouraged, especially in math. I had another professor, and I even addressed the problem specifically to him. I said to him that 95% of the class

is lecture, so I said to him could you repeat that date for me please because I didn't catch it. He said maybe you should be listening, and he did not give me the information...The two female professors had a comfortable learning environment and allowed students to ask questions and be actively engaged in their own learning process. This made it easier for students to learn. These were the mathematics and sociology classes. They each made an effort to learn our names, and I think that is really important. They each focused on positive attention and explained that we are here to learn, and that we were not expected to already know the material. Some professors just assume that you are going to know things. Both of these female professors made it possible for me to learn more than I thought I could. I really do appreciate open, accepting learning environments where you do more than just memorize for the test and then forget everything. Education is supposed to be for learning and not memorizing.

The last student in the community college category, May (44), believes that a classroom environment that allows for open dialogue can allow one to transform from their personal perceptions into people with new thoughts and ideas about their social world:

Right now I have four classes and three are mostly lecture classes. The sociology class allowed sharing and bridging it to my knowledge and I was able to learn not only stuff about the subject matter but about myself as well. That was the only class that I had like that. Another class was superficially a token. What do you think? Probably because they felt that they are supposed to at least ask. But the sociology class was unique, and that's why it meant so much to me. It was a transforming experience, and I understand my social world much more today than I ever had, simply because I was involved in my learning process. I could move forward from where I was to where I am today. I just didn't memorize the concepts and theories; I actually learned them, and I will never forget them... If I could design my own class, it would resemble the sociology class. My class would be as experiential as possible--make students responsible for doing the reading and assignments, but in the classroom it would be more open for discussion--dialogue and real learning. For me, an open learning environment equates to learning, and I value learning, not just memorizing. In order to really learn, you need to be able to make those connections to your own experience and make the education yours. You own it.

Five White Female Students at the Four-Year Private College – Question 3

Describe your experience in the classroom setting and discuss which classroom environment works best for your learning style.

The narratives of the five White students in the four-year private college category indicated that these students presently experience classrooms that include both lecture and facilitation formats. Two students, however, prefer a more traditional lecture format where the professor tells the students what they need to know. This observation was obvious in Sharon's (44) narrative. She said that:

Right now most of my classes are straight lecture, but for the most part the classroom environment is somewhat interactive. As far as what I prefer, well, it sometimes depends on the class, but mostly I want them, the professor, teaching me because I don't have a clue. But with an element of sharing, we can learn from one another. However, I don't want very much of that. So give me what I need to know because I don't know anything.

In addition, Alexandria (48) expresses what her in-class experiences have been like and why she prefers a traditional classroom format to an alternative classroom environments:

This semester I have had a variety of classroom settings. I do value experiential learning because it probably makes it easier because a lot of times I relate things to my own personal experiences, or you can get into the subject deeper. What do I like; I think I like it all. But I guess if I had to choose, I'm more a traditional student. I like the lecture. I like them to impart what they know; you know the instructor. Technically, I want to know everything they know. And I want them to tell me that in eight weeks. So I prefer a lecture. Tell me what you want me to know.

Three of the students in the four-year private college category believed that being educated in alternative teaching/learning environments allowed them to move beyond memorization. Amy (35) had this to say:

This semester most of the instructors encourage students to actively engage in their learning process. They want to get at the knowledge by allowing you to make some connections to your own experiences. When you have a chance to do that it might make a little more sense for somebody else who may not be grasping it. But, in a traditional lecture format, that doesn't happen and those quiet students may miss out learning. I only had one class where the professor did not encourage or respect students to use their own voices. It was an algebra class, and I got out of there. That's why I chose this college because the classes are smaller-

20-25 students. I like as much interacting as I can. I have a really hard time just taking straight notes. Plus for me, I really don't learn much. Again, I have been fortunate this semester because most of my classes have been engaging.

When students have an opportunity to be educated in a diverse classroom setting, it is possible for them to move beyond some of the stereotypes learned earlier in life.

This observation was true for Leslie (41). She said that:

My experiences at this college have been varied. I'm a sociology major, and most of my classes involve a lot of interaction between the professors and the students. But in some of my other classes, I have had a few professors push me off to the side. They don't want to explain it to me cause I am not getting it like I should or understanding it. They don't want to take the time to make me understand. Because they prefer not to have a lot of interaction from the students, they just want to give you what they think you need... I prefer a more active classroom setting. I don't like real structured learning. I like classes where the students have a lot of input... This semester was the first time that I had two Black students in class. One woman, she was a riot. Both women were smart. But this one, she was so funny, and I enjoyed working in groups with her. It was a great experience... You know, I am forty years old, and she is probably the first Black person that I've ever had a conversation with in my life. Now that's sad... This society socializes you to fear Black people. Unfortunately that is what I have been taught. Fortunately, this semester I had a chance to dispel some of those stereotypes because the experience I had was very positive. This is something that needs to be worked on.

Beth (40, the last student in the four-year private college category said made the following observation:

I would say that most of the instructors I have had use a facilitation style. They have some that is lecture, but they do it in such a way that they draw you in. As far as which classroom setting I prefer, it depends on the subject, it depends on the teacher, and it depends on the students. I have had classes that are all over the board and it just depends on the instructor. I think as long as the instructor is open and allows the class to flow there's not a problem. I am trying to be flexible enough where I can deal with almost anything. The only thing I don't like is when the professor say, to read the book and we'll test you on it, because I can't read it and understand it without tossing it around and playing with it. I'll fail. So as an adult student it helps me when I can rely on my experiences to help me understand the material, as well as the examples the instructor uses to make things plain.

Summary of the Ten White Female Students – Question 3

Of the ten students, three expressed having both “very positive” and “very negative” experiences. Two of these women attended the community college, and they each believed that their female professors provided them with more growth and development beyond the subject matter. These female professors encouraged open dialogue as each student was able to use her own experience as a point of reference. On the other hand, these same women discussed having a “very negative” experience with at least one of their male professors. One of these women describe a male professor as condescending and felt like he treated her with disrespect. The other female student expressed that the male professor she had didn’t treat her different, when she actually was different. In fact, he talked down to her and treated her like a child. There was only one student in the four-year private college category who expressed having a negative experience in an algebra class which she promptly dropped.

All ten students value experiential learning and a facilitation classroom environment. However, of the ten, only three students--one in the community college category and two in the four-year private college category--expressed preferring a more traditional classroom environment where the professor is in control of the structure of the class. In other words, these three preferred a lecture format, where the professor can tell them what they need to know. The other seven students-- four in the community college category and three in the four-year private college category—were convinced that they learn more effectively within an environment that allows them to be actively engaged in their own learning process. These women acknowledged that they value learning and not just memorizing for the test. They enjoyed learning when they had an opportunity to

become transformed. One of the three students in the four-year private college category discussed having some of her stereotypes dispelled because she had an opportunity to be educated in a diverse classroom--an environment where she was allowed to engage her peers in open dialogue about race and ethnicity. This new racial awareness was a "very positive" experience. This was the only student in the four-year private category who discussed having a "very positive" or a "very negative" experience within the classroom.

Five White Female Students at the Community College – Question 4

As a nontraditional female do you feel that your identity is being silenced by the institution (race, gender, social class)?

One student, May (40), responded to the question of silencing with the following comment:

No, I don't think so because at this community college classes are smaller, instructors are readily available, and I don't feel silenced in that way. I think that I wasn't treated differently, and I was different. In that sense, part of me was not acknowledged at all because I wasn't the same as everybody else, and they would say, "You better get back here on time when you leave this room for your break." They're chastising, and if I were a youth, I would be offended. Not only am I not a youth, I don't like to be talked to like that... It was doubly offensive to me because I was older, and I'm in this room full of traditional-age students getting this lecture with the finger. So, "yes" in that respect, I was silenced and not acknowledged as a nontraditional student or an adult.

Two students believed that they were in no way silenced by the community college. One of these women believed that, as a nontraditional female student, she was somewhat favored. According to Desiree:

I don't feel that my identity in any way has been silenced by the institution. In some respects I was favored. I think that we nontraditional females are encouraged to keep up the hard work. When I start to feel as though I'm not succeeding in a class, the instructors and other peers are very supportive. I like that. It feels good. It makes me feel comfortable with the encouragement that I get from not only the instructors, but from traditional-age students as well.

Janet (41), the other student who does not feel silenced, said that:

I have never experienced being silenced within the institution; no, not at all. I feel very comfortable. There is in my psychology class; I wondered a couple of times, but in that class, I am the only older student. All the students in there are eighteen and nineteen years old, and there have been times I thought that she is not asking for my participation enough. Or, maybe she is doing that because she doesn't want to single me out. Basically, what I am saying is that "no," I don't really feel silenced by the institution.

The last two students in the community college category felt somewhat silenced by the institution. They each expressed that gender as well as age made an impact on their feelings of silence. Candie (40) had this to say:

Well, I think that I don't see it with the female professors. I really don't see a difference in the way students are treated. I also don't see much of a difference in professors who are relatively new. I think with a lot of male professors that have been here longer, I think I do feel silenced. I have lots of examples, but this one male professor--I believe that this had to do with gender bias and age bias. I didn't hear the men complaining about their grades, but I did hear it among the women, especially the nontraditional women. We got the lowest grades. This professor was not accessible, plus he was condescending to me and said, "If you didn't understand you should have been listening." A male counselor made a negative impact on my identity as a nontraditional female student. He expressed that it would not be realistic for me to get an advance degree due to that fact that I was older. He said that it would be difficult for me to get hired because of being an older woman. In some respects, I see this as gender and age bias.

Samantha (26) also felt silenced due to age and gender bias:

I think so. I think that instructors cater to the younger students because there are so many more of them than the older students. So I think that the younger traditional students are catered to more than nontraditional students. I have noticed that with some male instructors, when you get younger girls in the class, you can tell they get better treatment and attention than someone like me. Even the bookstore treats nontraditional students differently... I would be left to try and find the book I needed on my own. That has happened to me quite a bit. Also, in the middle of trying to find a book for a class in the library, the workers would ignore me. A lot of it is with the younger workers and staff because they are busy talking about their last party rather than giving me the help I need. I've been in the library and stood in line and someone ahead of me is talking to the worker about a party and I am standing there ready to check out a book. So in that respect I do feel silenced.

Five White Female Students at the Four-Year Private College – Question 4

As a nontraditional female student do you feel that your identity is being silenced by the institution (race, gender, social class)?

Four of the five White students in the four-year private college category did not feel silenced by the institution. They believed that they were not treated differently than traditional female students who attend the college. According to Leslie (41):

“I don ‘t feel that my identity is being silenced. I have had some wonderful professors.”

Alexandria (48) believes that the private four-year college has not silenced her in any way. In fact, she felt more respected and appreciated. Further, she believed that neither her gender nor her age has been compromised. Alexandria said that:

You know... I feel more respected as an older female student. I have had female professors as well as male professors who appreciate you more and let you know that. And even the kids, as I call them, respect me as much as I respect them when I am in their study group or other groups. It’s kind of a mutual kind of thing. I have not been disrespected in any way. It’s been just wonderful here.

Instead of being silenced, another student felt favored. She believed that the institution valued her because she was an older student and committed to pursuing her education. Beth (40) had this to say:

I haven’t felt that, but I’m not a person who would put up with that. I couldn’t deal with it, if that’s how my school experiences were, I couldn’t be going here... I feel sometimes that I’m a little favored actually. Because you are a lot of times closer to the instructor’s age. I don’t believe that the students are intimidated by me. The distance isn’t there. Well, it’s good for me; I don’t know if it’s good for the other nontraditional students.

Not unlike Beth, Amy (35) also did not feel silenced by the four-year private college. She appreciated the college’s small and comfortable environment, and faculty

and staff have shown her nothing but respect. However, she did observe a specific difference between traditional and nontraditional students on campus. She noted that:

Personally, I do not think that this college is silencing my identity. Probably the only thing different is traditional students do get involved; they are involved in a lot of other activities on campus. A lot of times I don't realize things are even happening. You feel a little out of the loop. I think that's a big part of it. But as a nontraditional student, I work and really don't have the time. So I really haven't witnessed any differences in how people treat traditional or nontraditional students. The professors expect for you to all do the same work. Everyone at this college basically has the same requirements.

Instead of feeling connected to the institution, some women felt like outsiders. The narratives also revealed that one student in particular felt as though her accomplishments academically did not measure up to those of traditional students. She believed that her identity as a nontraditional student was silenced because she felt marginalized in comparison to the traditional college students. This showed that there was a difference in how nontraditional students were treated unequally by the institution. Sharon (44) had this to say:

I think that the differences is not so much gender, but in traditional versus nontraditional. And as a nontraditional student, I have experienced a silencing experience here. I have been on the Dean's List consistently, and they have a large ceremony for the people on the Dean's List and you walk up to the Student Center and there's this big sign which reads, "Welcome Parents." Well excuse me. You know, I'm a nontraditional student, and I'm paying my own way and my mom and dad aren't holding my hand and carrying me in here. There is an automatic assumption that I am traditional age and; therefore, those of us who are nontraditional feel slighted. It is insensitive, and it also sends a message that traditional age students have the right to celebrate this, and I actually feel kind of discounted in that. It would be better if they had a sign saying, "Welcome Family" or simply "Welcome Honor Students" and then give credit to those who support us and allow this to happen once we get into the building. So, yes, I have felt silenced within this institution.

Summary of the Ten White Female Students – Question 4

The feelings of silence and invisibility was felt by four of the ten White students attending a community college and a four-year private college. Of the four students who felt that their identities were silenced by their institution, two of them were from the community college, and one was attending the four-year private college. These women felt that their institutions, in some ways, violated their sense of self-worth and they felt isolated, like outsiders, and not really a part of the institution. The student attending the four-year private college felt isolated and on the outside because her academic achievements were less significant due to the insensitivity of the college's method of announcing the celebration. The sign "Welcome Parents" left her feeling like she was not a part of the celebration. Her uniqueness as a nontraditional student was not acknowledged nor recognized. This silencing made her realize that she was, in some respects, isolated from the traditional college students. The women attending the community college cited different reasons why they felt their identities were being silenced by the institution. They, too, felt silenced because of how the professors and traditional students related to them inside and outside of the classroom.

Six of the ten women experienced no sense of invisibility or marginalization as nontraditional female students. Many expressed that they felt favored, respected, and appreciated because of their nontraditional status. They also believed that the professors did not expect more from them because they were older. In other words, they were not singled out because of being adult female students.

In sum, there were more students who did not feel isolated or silenced within their educational environments. In comparing a community college with a four-year private college, there was no important difference in regards to the concept of “silencing.” However, the women who did feel silenced did not express their feelings or advocated for any type of change within the institution. None of the four women discussed confronting the institution. Instead, they continued to work in silence to complete their goals of a college education.

Five White Female Students at the Community College – Question 5

What obstacles or barriers make an impact on your academic success (situational Institutional, dispositional)? Note: Within this question the participants also discussed family and religious support.

Some of the students in the community college cohort are wives, mothers, single parents, employees, and students. The single parents not only experience the same situational barriers as the married women, they also suffer the discouraging responses from others as they pursue their goals of providing better lives for themselves and their children. Each of them reported that situational, institutional, and/or dispositional barriers had an impact on them as nontraditional college students. Some of the women in this category discussed how their family and religious support can help or hinder their potential to be successful students. The demands of juggling all of their responsibilities, as well as growing and developing into whole individuals can cause a strain on both the family and the nontraditional student. This observation was apparent in Candie’s (40) narrative:

I think that the most serious barrier is probably that my family’s expectations of me have not changed. They expect the wife and mother to be the same as she was. I have all of these other responsibilities that I didn’t have before. So I think that

hardest obstacle that I have had is having them allow me to be something else... I am growing and developing into a more complete individual, becoming more myself. You know, I think that scares them a little bit. I think that trying to fulfill all of their needs and meet my needs in order to get my education has put a lot of pressure on me. It has been very challenging. My husband and daughter are very supportive and proud of my accomplishment. If I did not have their support, I wouldn't be here. So most of my situational barriers center around my family... I remember my daughter telling me that she wished that I had never gone into college. And I said why? I thought that you supported me. She said "Well, I want my mom back." I expressed to her that I can't quit and that I have to finish my education. She understands but it is still hard on her. In regards to my husband, he is very supportive, but I think that he is a little afraid because he does see me growing. So that could possibly become a situational barrier... He notices that my identity has changed somewhat. I have grown, but I think that he has also recognized that maybe I'm not as dependent, you know. Because now I can rely upon myself. I think that makes him a bit more fearful. But I think it's a good thing. You know, he's paying a bit more attention to what's going on.

Another student in the category discussed that she has multiple situational barriers: scheduling classes around her work schedule, and as a single parent making sure that her daughter is well taken care of both physically and financially. Along with her many responsibilities, she has to deal with the negativity of her parents, which she refers to as her biggest obstacle or situational barrier. She also cited that being a single parent has affected her financially, and that is why she can only take one and sometimes two classes per semester. In her own voice, Samantha (26) had this to say:

A big barrier for me is my parents. My parents pushed my brothers into attending college. But as far as me, they told me college isn't for everyone. Because I was more the average student and I was so quiet, they did not think that I would do good in school because of that fact... I want to be a social worker, but my parents don't think that I should. They think I'd be a good teacher. They think that I am too emotional and that I would not be able to disconnect and I'd run down and it's just not the job for me... It is because of that situational barrier that I did not study what I wanted to study in the beginning. I kept trying to do what my parents thought was right for me... My work schedule is also a situational barrier. I am working two jobs, trying to make ends meet for my daughter and me. One job is thirty-six hours per week and the other around fifteen per week, and sometimes it can get very difficult trying to balance work, being a single mom and school. So sometimes financially things can get a bit rough.

Two other students in the community college category also reported that financial barriers impacted their abilities to stay focused on their goals. There was only one student, Janet (41), in the financial category, who expressed that she does not have any situational barriers with child care or trying to juggle job, school, and family. However, she stated that she created her own situational barrier:

Well, quitting my career has become a situational barrier, which was two-third of the family income at home. The bills are being paid and that type of thing, but it is what I needed to do. I think that the most serious thing is the money and getting myself settled into class... My husband is very supportive, but every once in a while I feel that, you know, he'll say "Is there anything else that happened at work." You know it's like he doesn't understand the fact that I had to change. I have two children; they are nineteen and twenty and are both in college. They are very supportive... Because they are older, I don't have any type of situational barriers. They are self-sufficient, but I am there when they need me. They are really proud of me. They think it is cool that their mom is going to college and doing something for myself.

Because adult women pursuing higher education have other adult responsibilities, it is often times crucial for them to have strong family support. This observation was apparent in May's (44) narrative. Although she discussed finances as a situational barrier, she also expressed that without the support of her husband and children, she would not be a nontraditional college student:

I knew I had to do either work and family or school and family. Otherwise the family would suffer. I had to know financially that we could live on one salary to maintain the family. It was at the point that my younger children were independent enough, and I decided to go back to school. Then it was only part-time because I still had some kids at the age where they needed me. Especially, one particular child needed more of my time and attention than some of the other children. So, basically, children's needs, I guess, is a big one. My family is extremely supportive. My husband always wanted me to go to school, but he knew that I didn't want to be disconnected with the children... I have been blessed with the support that I have received from my family. My mother has also been very supportive. She always wanted me to go to college and complete my education as well, and she continuously gives me encouragement. My husband was always ready for me to do it no matter what it took. He would have sold the house, whatever... When I was gone so much, I asked the kids if they were all

right, and they were fine. One of them said, “when are you going to make money again?” because they know that their allowance was cut.. They were more concerned about things like that.

The last student in the community college category reported similar situational barriers. Desire (48) said that:

I would have to say trying to raise my children and giving them time as a mother. By working full time and going to school, I think that makes it a very large struggle. I have been a single parent most of my adult life and the only parent in my children’s lives. However, I feel my pursuing more education has helped my daughter become a better student. She is now an honor student where she was kind of a floundering fish out of water before. So for me, the biggest situational barrier is that my children need my attention, and not being able to give it to them can be a barrier at times. I continue to work on balance. I do receive support from my parents as far as helping take care of my children. My mother took care of my children while I worked. I also had a neighborhood teenager who would help take care of my children. However, I do not receive the kind of encouragement I would like from my family, siblings, and parents. I never neglected my children; I went to school programs, and my daughter was in sports, and I went to all of her games. My husband is also very supportive of my education. I was concerned about my relationship with my husband when I started taking classes. I am in my third marriage. I had problems in my second marriage about my going back to school. But, my present husband, encourages me a lot with my education and takes care of my children. They are actually his stepchildren, and he could cause all kinds of grief about my being in college, but he doesn’t. He supports me.

Three students in the community college category reported that they have experienced institutional barriers. These students cited issues with counseling, parking, instructors, lack of mentors, and the lack of a support system for nontraditional female students. They claim that the needs of nontraditional female students are different from those of traditional students, and many institutions do not have specific programs in place to assist those adults who have been out of the educational arena for long periods of time.

This was evident in Samantha’s (26) narrative:

There are no support groups. I believe that support groups would be very beneficial for nontraditional women students. From my perspective, that is an institutional barrier that makes an impact on my success. I also have to say that teachers are not support systems for older students. I think the reason teachers

are a big barrier is their lack of flexibility. And that can be a big barrier to anyone's academic success. I had a couple of good teachers--the English and sociology instructors have been flexible, but other than that, "no." Let me give you an example. I had one teacher--a man who is married and has no children. He does not understand people that have families or single parents. It's like I was not accepted... One day I got a call in class, and I had to leave early because my child was running a fever and was quite sick. He did not understand, and they have certain rules and won't bend them... He had planned an outing--a field trip one Saturday. I had to work, and he said that was not acceptable. I had to lose work. He was not flexible. He had no consideration for a parent or a working parent... Parking can also be a real problem and can create a barrier. I have more examples about teachers, but I think you get the idea.

May (44) had a variety of institutional barriers that have impacted her personally and academically. She discussed the different issues she has had to overcome and work through to remain focused on her goal of a college degree:

I would have liked more guidance. If you have a question they would answer it, but they did not go the extra mile. I would have liked a little more personal care from the counselor because going back to school and being older can be difficult. Older people are less secure, and you wonder if you are doing the right thing. But the counselor and connection to the four-year college that I will be transferring to has been wonderful. I didn't find those concerns and care from the community college counselor... I'm not saying this because you are interviewing me, but I think that that you were the only instructor that filled the role of mentor for me. I knew that I could go to you with anything and not be embarrassed, and you were always so encouraging. You were the first instructor who told me that they were proud of what I was accomplishing and you were proud of me. You can't even imagine what that meant to me. So not having mentors can be a real institutional barrier for older students... Tutoring has been an institutional barrier. I was signed up with a young man who I was told was brilliant and a wonderful Math tutor... To make a long story short, he was not good for me. He was condescending, and you don't set somebody up with somebody that can't do math, and I could not do math. You can't relate. He didn't have the first clue how to teach somebody unless they were already very good and they could enter the jargon with him on how to do this or that. That was quite an experience... He was too young to be expected to teach someone else math who doesn't understand it. I asked him to show me how to do it and he said no, that would be cheating. Anyway, that was an institutional barrier because I did not get the help I needed. My husband had to work one-on-one with me, but that put a strain on his ability to be available to help the children with their homework... I also found that a lot of teachers assumed that you knew what was going on in the class. My background is somewhat unusual, even for a traditional student because I had no

real formal education. So I have this big hole of ignorance. Instructors making those assumptions can be a barrier.

Candie (40) was another White student in the community college category who also experienced several different institutional barriers. She believes that some type of support group for nontraditional female students could prepare them to meet the challenges they will face, especially family pressures and trying to balance all of their responsibilities. She said:

All of the challenges to being a nontraditional student were not addressed when I first came back to school. I think it should be. In that regard, a support group would be very beneficial and could prepare nontraditional students to understand the challenges that they may have to face... As a nontraditional student returning to college, there are things you are not aware of and you really don't know what to expect. I think some type of support group for returning college students would be a plus. I think that we are going into classroom settings where instructors are assuming that we already have the information we no longer have... I approached a particular professor for help, and he said it's just too bad. He made it very clear to me that he did not want me questioning any aspect of the class. He did not want it brought to his attention. He was going to do it his way, and if I didn't like it, it was tough. Yep, that's the way it happened. That is a big institutional barrier, when instructors are not willing to teach you and make sure that you understand the material. So support would be wonderful--where nontraditional students could share information about which professors not to take. Those kinds of things could have prepared me for these kinds of barriers... No one told me this was normal--having instructors who were hard to deal with... Counseling can also be a barrier for nontraditional female students. One counselor told me that I needed a reality check because at my age; I won't get the money back that I have put into my education and that I should not narrow my job field... So I don't use a counselor since I had him. I realize the classes I need to take, so I just focus on getting those classes.

Two students in the community college category reported having no institutional barriers. They were both comfortable with their experiences within the institution. One student reported that this was her first semester attending college for over ten years and thus far had not experienced any type of institutional barriers. Janet (41) said that:

This is my first semester back in over twenty years, and thus far things have been going well. I am learning and growing, and that is a good thing. So, no, I have not

experienced any type of negativity. The instructors, students, and everything has been good thus far.

It was revealed in the narrative that the other student had worked for the college for twenty-two years and had not experienced any type of institutional barrier in all of the years she has taken classes. Thus, Desire (48) reported that:

As far as institutional barriers, I do not really have any concerns as far as classes being available when I need them. I have worked for the institution for almost twenty-two years, so I have been around students and teachers. I do not need any type of support group because I am comfortable with the institution and understand the ins and outs. However, a support group would be helpful for those that haven't been around an educational institution, because it can be a frightening experience. Getting your feet back into something you haven't done for years can be very frightening and when not getting support at home, a support group would be very helpful. It seems like the older men are accepted and that women still belong at home with the kids. But I have not experienced any type of institutional barriers--none at all.

The last barrier—dispositional--was discussed with each student during the interviews. Dispositional barriers are those barriers that are self-imposed as it relates to how one feels about their abilities to be a successful college student, and any type of internal insecurities that may impinge upon the female students' ability to interact socially and academically. All five of the students in the community college category suffered with some type of dispositional barrier. This fact was illustrated in Samantha's (26) narrative:

When I returned back to college, those feelings and insecurities were probably more intense. I had a poor self-image and poor self-esteem. I thought that I was very dumb, so I think that my biggest barrier has been to overcome my insecurities, and I guess that I have a lot to prove to my family in trying to change their minds. I want to prove to my family that I can be successful... Another dispositional barrier that I suffer with is guilt. I think it is a big one--being away from my child. Not only do I take time away to go to class, but I also take out time to study. So I'm trying to deal with the guilt feelings... Dispositional barriers for me are huge. My insecurities about my academic capabilities, my feeling dumb and inferior in comparison to younger students have made a big impact on me... I realize that I have done well academically, but I struggle constantly about

my insecurities of not measuring up. I know that has a lot to do with my earlier education and my family's lack of encouragement and support when I was younger. I have been my own worst enemy by having all of these feelings of self-doubt. I constantly work at overcoming those feelings.

Desiree (48) is another student in this category who suffers and struggles with dispositional barriers:

Being a very poor student in high school it was frightening for me to take classes at the college level. I do still struggle with leaving my comfort zone, but I do it anyway. I realize that the only way to learn new things is to leave your comfort zones and expand my knowledge. I don't always remember to let myself go, but if I keep telling myself that it will be all right, I at least give it a try. It's like some days when I go to class and I am just not grasping what is being taught; I think what am I doing here? But for the most part those days are getting less and less.

Often dispositional barriers can be so disruptive that many nontraditional students are not able to focus properly on their goals. Many of these students felt that dispositional barriers were the biggest barriers they had to overcome. This observation was also revealed in May's (44) narrative:

Wow, I had a lot of concerns, and I think that there is nothing to justify my concerns. But I think my insecurities are with my bad experiences and my feelings of being stupid, but that will always be with me... Humm, my earliest recollection in elementary school was when they put me in what the kids called the "dummy group..." Because my mother was fighting so hard for me, it made me feel that I must need a lot of help... So for me, I think that dispositional barriers have made the biggest impact on me, especially my fear of math. One class was Math 40, and I spent the entire semester on that one math class. And the other semester--another math class... I was really afraid of it, and I thought that I have a good brain, and if that's all I do, I have to be able to do this even if I pass with a low C. So that was a really big fear.

Candie (40), another student in the community college category, expressed that she too deals with her inner voice and works to get it under control so it will not impact the successful completion of her degree. She had this to say about her dispositional barriers and its impact on her success:

There have been some dispositional barriers; it would be foolish to say there hasn't been any. Because I was not a good student in high school and I was concerned about my academic abilities, I decided to attend college. I think that when the counselor discouraged me, it had an impact on me and how I felt about myself. This internal thing with whether or not I am too old to pursue my dreams of a graduate degree, and if I am capable to pull it off academically, is a large dispositional barrier. With all of this in the back of my mind, I still don't know if I will go any further with my education. I am still considering it, and I am looking at how old I will be when I enter the work force... But I realize that my failure will come only from my inability to learn, and it will not come from quitting. So for me, I just have to stay focused on my goal and continue to tell myself that I can do anything that I make up my mind to do.

The last White student in the community college category echoed similar sentiments about the dispositional barriers that psychologically weighs heavy on her.

Janet (41) had this to say about her dispositional barriers.

The dispositional or psychological barriers hinder me the most. There are times when I am wondering if this is just a pipe dream. I wonder; sometimes I wonder why; sometimes I have such guilt feelings. I should be there working and earning my \$60,000 a year. That is the only hard thing that is happening. It is myself, being difficult with myself. So, if anything is a barrier, it is me being a barrier to myself. I am still tough on myself. I can't get rid of all of these guilt feelings that I should be working... What I have come to realize is that money wasn't as important as I had placed on it. I got to where I thought I wanted to be, and I was miserable, and lately I have come to realize that all the material stuff is not the most important thing in the world. Because I was so miserable, I started drinking again after quitting twenty years ago. So it was time for a change, and I just have to keep focusing on that and not the guilt. So for me, the dispositional barriers have been hard.

Of the five White students attending the community college, three of them discussed their religious and spiritual backgrounds. Of these three female students, one of them discussed how she has been transformed from being religious to spiritual. Janet (41) said that:

I know I keep going back and forth, but I want to say something about my family and how I grew up. My parents were Christian Reform. The way I grew up was with, as I call it, a dysfunctional Christian Reform family. Church to me, when I was a child, was just a ritual we did every Sunday. I didn't feel that if this is what it is to be a Christian, you know, I didn't like my life. I was five years old and

depressed. This is not a good way to be. But something happened during the last year that has been really exciting. I should back up. Church when I got married was something we did if we felt like it... I went through all of my problems over the years, and I had to get down one day and say, God I can't do this any more, I can't. Oh my gosh, you know it's just like you were saying one day. There is a difference between religion and spirituality. One thing I would like to say is religion is for people that don't want to go to hell, and spirituality is for people who have already been there. I believe that God guides me. I believe that is the reason for the calmness and peace that I have in my life today. It wasn't there a year ago. It hasn't been like that my entire life... I do believe that my God has a definite reason for me to be here. I never believed that before. As this is the first time I have ever felt that, I know that there is a reason for me to be doing what I am doing at this time in my life. I have peace.

May (44) and Samantha (26) did not provide a specific dialogue about their religious or spiritual support. However, they each expressed throughout their narratives about how blessed they were in reference to their children and for May her husband and his continual support of her goals. On the other hand, Candie (40) believes that God helps her to stay focused on her educational goals and being available to help others:

My commitment to stay focused on my education has a lot to do with my spiritual relationship. It has helped me stay focused on the goal I have set for myself. My faith in God and faith in myself has me believing that I have a purpose for being here at this community college--to help other nontraditional students. I met a nontraditional female student who had been attending here for five years, and I took an interest in helping her with taking notes, keeping her focused on her studies, and encouraging her to not give up on herself and that she could be successful. She had potential, but other people couldn't recognize it. Other students couldn't understand why I befriended her. Maybe this is not about me, but about the lives that I touch along the way. Maybe my faith in God is why I am here--to touch that woman's life in a positive manner. So I definitely know that God is in control of my life.

The narratives also revealed that the last student in the community collegecategory believed that her church was in a sense a situational barrier. Therefore, Desiree (48) said that:

At one time I was very close with a church, but I had a personal situation come up, and when I went to the church to get the support needed, it wasn't there. So in a way, my church became somewhat of a situational barrier that I was not

planning on happening. I thought that I could depend on my church... It was a very difficult time for me, and I found a support group that had more spirituality than the church. The support group was just phenomenal with the spiritual strength they provided for me. Even though I am not with an organized religion, I still believe there is a greater power taking care of me. With this power, and a long time coming, I have gotten my life on the right track. Spirituality is very important to have in my life, and that gives me peace and serenity that I need to stay focused on my task.

Five White Female Students at the Four-Year Private College – Question 5

What obstacles or barriers make an impact on your academic success (situational, institutional, dispositional)? Note: Within this question, participants also discussed family and religious support.

The students in the four-year private college category experienced a variety of situational barriers. There was only one student in this category who expressed that she did not experience any type of situational barriers. Amy (35) said:

As far as situational barriers, I don't have any because I don't have any parents or children. However, when my sister's husband became ill and died, I took that semester off because I thought that it was more important for me to spend time with my sister. She had been married since she was eighteen, and now she is fifty-six and has no husband and never had to face the world on her own. So that is the only situational barrier that did impact my education. But I do not personally have any situations with children and stuff like that.

Many returning college students are often faced with a lack of support from their husbands. The husband feels threatened, and believes that their wives are growing apart from them because of the fact that they are changing and becoming transformed into new women. Therefore, this lack of spousal support can become a situational barrier for adult women as they try to accomplish their educational goals. Husbands who are feeling insecure can sabotage their goals of an education. Two of these four students reported that their husbands were situational barriers. Further, they shared how this lack of support from their spouses has affected them and made an impact on their abilities to stay

focused on what they need to do. Each expressed that they spend as much time trying to explain why they want to have a college degree as they do studying. One of these women, Leslie (41) had this to say about her husband as a situational barrier, and how her responsibilities as a mother can make an impact on her ability to stay focused on her education:

I would say my husband is a situational barrier. Unfortunately my family is also. I mean school has been a positive experience for me. I have done a lot of searching in my own soul, you know, and I have learned a lot of things about me from being here. But my family is a killer. My husband, when I first came back was afraid. He needs to deal with the issue of his first wife who left him after she graduated from college. So when I went back to school. He was panicked. The farthest thing from my mind was going through another divorce. I just want this for me. Plus, he was raised in a stable environment where his mother was home all the time, and his dad was a farmer. I mean she took care of everything plus cooked three meals a day. She took care of all of his wants and needs, and that's what he wants me to be—right there in the kitchen. So he is my largest situational barrier because of his lack of support when it comes to helping with the children... I only have one young one now--she is seven. I always make sure that she is taken care of; if she is not, she has to come to class with me. I don't depend on my husband. If my husband has something to do, he goes and does it. Then I have to worry about what my kids are going to do... If I don't make arrangements for sitters or meals, my husband won't do it. Oh no. It is my responsibility.

Sharon (44) was the other student who also viewed her husband as a situational barrier:

I am not being encouraged by my husband, and he is just not happy at all. So my schooling has led to some marital problems. I used my schooling and my job to fill a void in my personal life, and you know, I'm growing one way, and he's going another way. My sons have grown beyond needing me, and now he, my husband, needs to grow beyond needing that also. I feel that it is my time now to do something that is fulfilling for me. I now realize that abuse is not always physical; it is also emotional, and it doesn't show the scars. My parents are having a fit, an absolute fit. I told them that it is my life, and it is none of their business. I am absolutely not receiving any support from my husband or parents. My sons are very proud of me; they can only support me so much, and they don't need to provide me with emotional support... I also see that my husband is very proud of my achievement, but at the same time, he is jealous of it. He is jealous of the success and the time it takes away from him... I also experience situational barriers with my job schedule. I've taken a couple of semesters off due to the

demands of my job. I also took a semester off for my mental health and to get all of that in order. But I think the biggest situational barrier is my husband and his lack of support. Although he does not support me, it has not impacted my academic success.

The narratives also revealed that two students in the four-year private college category experienced work-related situational barriers. One of these women has adult children, and the other has no children. Thus, they do not struggle with those kinds of situational barriers; however, the narrative of the single student with no children revealed that she had a problem with being a single mothers attending school. This ideology is somewhat consistent with the stereotypes about single parents. Thus, Beth (40) had this to say:

I don't have any kids. I don't have a husband, so I don't do any of that kind of stuff. I don't have anyone griping about my time. It's just me griping about my time, saying I want more personal time. I'm very selfish with my time. I don't like to give it up. That's why I won't take any more summer classes... What amazes me are these single mothers who manage to work and go to school. I always wonder who's watching the kids, and what about your kid right now. I'm kind of negative that way... My family somewhat supports me, but my mom would like me to get married. She would support me very much in that. School? Well if you have to do that. They really wanted me to do that when I was getting out of high school, and they were very much behind me the first time I went to school... So right now, my mom would prefer if I were getting married.

Alexandria (48), the last student in this category, had this to say about her situational barriers:

Work, work, work gets in my way. It's like when I'm doing a paper or something; it has nothing to do with school, but it's probably another reason why I want to retire because work is an obstacle. It is a barrier. It's like I'm busy working on this, and, oh crud, I got to get to work. As far as situational barriers, I work, and that can be a barrier for me. Well, you know what, it takes planning if I find that I don't have time to study or something. I've done it to myself. Prioritizing--I have to prioritize, you know. And my family is number one; sorry but that's just the way life is. And yet they don't put impossible impositions on me. They work with me. I have my husband who backs me up all the time, "Don't worry about it, I'll get dinner, I'll do this." OK fine. So I'm blessed with that. I get support from everyone--my husband, children, daughter-in-laws. So the

support is there. For instance, I had a paper in my foundation class... I found some information in a different town and my husband was like, "yeah, we'll go and take picture to go with your report," so he just gets involved in it sometimes as much as I do. Other than work, no situations hinder me at all.

The narratives revealed that all of the students in this category experienced a variety of institutional barriers. All five of them discussed the class schedule as an institutional barrier and the fact that there are not enough night classes for nontraditional college students. Two of the students reported that professors can also be a barrier, along with counseling barriers, and others. Amy (35) reported several institutional barriers that impact her:

You can't always go into the counseling office and talk with someone. There are times when counselors are available a little later. I do email, so that helps, but you can't always get in there and sit down, where traditional student are right there on campus, and they don't have to drive over. I can drive over on my lunch and try to squeeze it in, and if something comes up and they can't meet with me, I have just wasted a trip. So that can be a barrier for students who are nontraditional and work full time. It would be helpful for us older students if there were someone available at least one night per week to help us with advising and financial assistance. The bookstore can also be a problem. It would be nice if you were able to do that during your class break. Again, if they had someone in the bookstore one night a week, I believe that could solve some of the problems of not being able to use the bookstore. To make a long discussion short, I would feel better if I could sit down with a counselor and have them tell me what I need to complete my degree. For me, the lack of counseling has really been a barrier. Another thing--there are so many things nontraditional students are not aware of, and it would be helpful to have something to initiate us to campus. We are scared, and we need a little extra help and support.

Beth (40) is another nontraditional student attending the four-year private college who also has experienced institutional barriers. She reported that:

Institutionally, the only problems I have had here were with one math class and not being able to get some classes when I needed them because they were not being offered. First of all, the problem with the instructor was that he told me that there are just some people who just can't do math. And I disagreed with that because I think you can; you just need someone to teach you. So I got out of there fast. So, from my point of view, the professor was an institutional barrier, so much so that I dropped the class. Also, I noticed the curriculum has been

shrinking a little the last few years. Or, maybe I'm just looking at the schedules wrong, but a lot of the classes that they have listed aren't on there anymore, or they aren't offered as often. I really felt that their curriculum has been shrinking. Seriously, I think it has. It's like you have them listed in your catalog so why aren't you offering them. As I think and talk about this, that really could be a barrier to getting some of the classes you need. So getting the classes you need in a timely manner to move forward in your degree program could be a real problem.

Class schedule and the inadequacy of the library has also been a real problem for Sharon (44). In her own words, she said that:

The insensitivity in scheduling classes can be quite difficult for nontraditional students. For people who are more than likely working at least part-time, if not full-time, the college should give them more flexibility in course scheduling. A number of classes, especially sociology, are strictly on a semester long basis and are given during the day. And they may be offered only in the fall or only in the spring semesters, and it doesn't allow for much flexibility. I am fortunate that I am salaried, and my place of employment backs me one hundred percent on getting this education, and they will work with me. But not many people have that blessing. Another thing that I find is insensitive for the person coming into this town and campus is the class that is only an hour and fifteen minutes, and they schedule it for two to three days per week. Schedule it once and make it a three-four hour class, and call it good. I spend more time on the road getting here and getting back to work than I do in the classroom... I just did a study here at this college, and the adult segment here at this college is decreasing. So they need to look at what they are doing here--what they are offering and how they are offering it in relationship to the nontraditional students. So the scheduling of classes is a big thing. The advising has been wonderful here... As far as institutional barriers, the library here is very inadequate, and their answer to that is technology, and that's great when technology is working, but when it wasn't working, you're at a dead stand still... Another problem I had was when I took the Introduction to Research and Design class and all of the assignments have to be done in the library, and you were dependent on the technology in order to be able to do this. So it is very demanding, and it would be nice to have another alternative, whether it is a program I can take home and do on my own computer or a paper copy of whatever is on their computer. I need some flexibility because they are not giving me any. So that is, indeed, an institutional barrier because we are locked into using the library on campus so you don't have an option to do it some place else.

There was another student, Leslie (41), in the four-year private college category, who also believed that professors can be a barrier when they do not provide support and

encouragement. She also feels that the institution should offer more night classes for nontraditional students. Leslie, reported that:

... they don't offer nontraditional students as many night classes. They are more structured towards the younger students--the traditional students. We have to work around their schedule--they don't work around ours. There are just not enough night classes. There certainly is not enough parking, and then you get tickets if you don't have a permit. You know, I just don't care for that; sometimes it is late when we get out of classes, and I don't like walking to my car alone so late at night. So I do get a lot of tickets if I park where the faculty and staff park. I don't know how to use the library. I don't know how to use all this stuff, and I don't want to take the time, so I split. But I don't always look, and maybe I should see things as barriers. I just say this is the way it is so I'm going to go over here and do something different. I never challenge it I guess. I never get any encouragement or reinforcement here about my work. I don't get it at home with my husband, and I don't get it here either. The instructors here don't say anything and they really don't block anything either. I don't think they have been really encouraging, and that could be considered a barrier because of the lack of mentoring and support from professors.

Also, there was one student who indicated that from her perspective, things at this four-year private college have been wonderful. She said that her institutional barriers have been minimal. Therefore, according to Alexandria (48):

This is a wonderful, nurturing environment to be educated in, and honestly, I didn't know what I was doing here. My advisor was wonderful. For her to just take my hand and lead me down the path with so much respect was great. I just love the woman. And I can always call her now and ask her if I should I be doing this or that. She's just a peach. I was not turned off when I went into my classes; the instructors were welcoming, comforting, and encouraging. It is a very comfortable environment. But if it had been the other way, I don't need that. But they made me want to try this school thing. The only institutional barrier I have experienced is getting classes when you need them; that can be a problem. I have not found one person who is negative.

A review of the narratives also revealed that four of the students in the four-year private college category experienced dispositional barriers.. These are barriers that are self-imposed in regards to their academic abilities and how they feel about themselves as

it relates to their self-esteem, insecurities, etc. There was only one student who reported having no dispositional barriers. Beth (40) had this to say:

I have no dispositional problems. I have a very high academic computation. I had it actually tested at the other four-year college ten years ago when I was thinking about going the first time, and they told me that I was up the roof on that. So I am somewhat exceptional, seriously. School is fun to me. So I am very confident in myself and my ability to accomplish my educational goals.

While Beth was feeling very confident in herself, the other four students had to overcome, and some are still overcoming, issues of self-doubt. Sharon (44) had this to say about her dispositional barriers:

Number one is self-confidence. "Yes, I am intelligent, and yes I can handle it and carry the load and do well." I had terrible fears of returning, just a terrible fear. Remember I said before, when I was in high school, I was more interested in being socially accepted, and I was not interested in the academics. For me, a C was good enough. I was simply terrified. I was not sure if I was smart enough to go to college. So I took a chance, and things were not as bad as I thought, but I still struggle with those feelings of not being good enough, even though I have done pretty well.

Although nontraditional female students are responsible adults who work, take care of their families, and are involved in outside activities, they never appear to be sure of their abilities, and they often feel insecure about their intellectual skills. Alexandria (48), the oldest student in the four-year private college category, Amy (35), and Leslie (41), each reported that they, too, had to deal with their insecurities about their abilities to be successful college students. Alexandria, Amy, and Leslie made the following comments. First, Alexandria said:

I was scared to death because in high school I was not good in math and science. I really have this mental block that I have been trying to work on because I put off taking the math and science courses. These stumbling blocks are in my head, and I know that. I think they're probably more in my head right now than anything else. So dispositional barriers tend to be my biggest barrier. Yes, and maybe by the time I get my doctorate, I'll have it down. So, that is by far a big barrier for me.

Amy had this to say about her dispositional barriers:

There are times when I feel pretty confident, but there are a few classes that I still struggle with. I dropped them because I felt so uncomfortable with it that I didn't want to have a bad grade show up and that I would be better off waiting and maybe try to get some help and take it later. Although I had a good experience in high school, I still worry if I can do this or not.

Leslie commented as follows:

When I think of dispositional barriers, I think about not being able to finish or not smart enough to finish. I have been back consistently now for two years, and I was scared when I came back. Although I have had some academic success, I am still concerned about my academic abilities. I think it has to do with the fact that I am older, and I am sitting in class with these younger kids and they appear to be so intelligent. It's like well, I just don't know where they are getting all this information because it's not inside of me. Other than not having any type of support from my husband, dispositional barriers are a big, scary barrier for me.

Lastly, these White students reported that their religious or spiritual backgrounds were a form of support, encouragement, and comfort to them as they work to pursue their educational endeavors. Although most of the women discussed their spiritual support, some were more specific in their comment than others. Some of the students were not involved in organized religion but believed that there was a power greater than themselves. This was the case for Leslie (41):

I consider myself a spiritual person, and I know there is something bigger than me that keeps me on this path. Sometimes I would be going along and I would be really distributed about something, and I'll go to God and just ask for help. I do that, and it's helpful.

On the other hand, another student discussed how spirituality has been a part of her life since she was a child, and that it was her religious faith which kept her grounded and protected her through the difficult times. With this introduction, Alexandria (48) said:

You know spirituality has always been a part of my life. Being a member of my church even when I was a little kid was the big grounder for me. I'm from a home that had an alcoholic father, and the only constant that I had in my life was church. That's where I always felt at home. I'm going to start crying. So that's one thing that I can't give up. God/Jesus was there guiding me. Well, it's true. I mean He was always there for me as a kid. Giving you a reason, there's got to be something better, giving you a reason to hope. Without hope, what do you do? He sent me this wonderful man that I married and beautiful children. You know what could I ask for. It's kind of like OK, you went through some bad stuff, but it's getting better. You know the good stuff is here and now and you can appreciate it and praise Him. The fact is that God has put all of this together for me. How fortunate and how blessed I am to have this support and to have college and those people here at the college to get me through this. You can't accept the fact that all of this is coming to you and you deserve. Do I? I don't know. You know that's a hard concept to have too--do I deserve all of this stuff, but I guess it's OK because it's here. I just keep going right through those doors that God has opened for me, and I'm still here.

Beth (40) considers herself spiritual even though she does not go to church. She said that:

I have had it with church. I have been with a community church. In fact, Christianity and I really, really, really enjoyed that church, and then they did the same thing the church I grew up in did. The congregation decided that they didn't like the pastor and just disrupted the whole church and I haven't gone back. Even though I didn't go to church for a long time, I still consider myself a spiritual person. I think it is hard to live through life and not be. It is my spiritual side that keeps me focused on my goal of completing my education.

Interestingly, nine of the ten students in the four-year private college category believed that it was their spirituality that kept them focused on their goals. Sharon (44) was another student who echoed the same sentiments about her religious support:

My spiritual life absolutely keeps me focused also, because I know that this is my sixth year of going to school to try to complete a four-year degree... So my spirituality provides me with that encouragement, support and that strength that I need to get through. Because, remember that I am not getting that at home from my husband. Obviously, there is crisis in my life, and it creates chaos and yet I'm able to have order mentally to go in and pass a very difficult test. I know that only comes from the Holy Spirit and when I sit down and study, it's like I can't do this without you Lord, and you know that. God knows that. And I know that it is through the Holy Spirit that I am able to retain and apply amidst the chaos and

crisis. I want to add that everyone should be encouraged to go back to school. It has really meant a lot to me. In some respects, it has been my salvation... I only have four classes left, and to be honest with you, the thought of graduating already leaves me with a void. And part of it scares me because it has filled such a void in my life and now what am I going to do. So many people are encouraging me, but my husband is just not happy at all. So my spirituality gives me the strength to hang on.

While four students were very assertive in discussing their spirituality, Amy (35) was the only student in the four-year private college category who did not provide any information about her religious or spiritual support.

Summary of the Ten White Female Students – Question 5

Some similarities and differences exist between the ten White students attending a community college and a four-year private college. Of the ten women who are married, two of them, both in the four-year private college category, received no support from their spouses. In fact, they each reported that their husbands were their biggest barriers. Both of these women were emotionally abused, but they did not let the pain of the emotional abuse deter or affect their abilities to successfully move through their academic programs. However, they believed that their education was their salvation. One of these women also expressed that she is dreading that she will soon be graduating because her education and her job filled a void in her life. Therefore, she is seriously considering graduate school. Also, this woman receives absolutely no support from her parents who are very traditional and believe that she should put her husband's needs before her own. So in that regard, she is receiving negativity from two fronts--her husband and her parents.

Even though these women did not receive any support from their husbands, their children were very supportive and proud of the fact that they went back to school. One

student, in the community college category, received some support from her husband, but according to her, he goes back and forth with his support because he can't understand why she left her \$60,000 per year job. Another student in the community college category reported that her husband supports her and is very proud of her academic accomplishments. But he also feels somewhat insecure because she is growing and changing. On the other hand, her daughter would prefer that she discontinue her academic career. Therefore, her family support was unstable. Three of these students, two in the community college category and one in the four-year private college category, receive strong support from their families, their husbands, children and other family members.

Two of the ten White students in the four-year private college category reported having no personal situational barriers. Neither is married, nor do they have children. They each receive support from their families; however, one woman expressed that her mother would rather support her getting married, as she has no grandchildren. Other than that, they did not express any significant lack of family support. There were three students in the community college category who reported that one of their biggest situational barriers centered around financial issues. But no one in the four-year private college category discussed finances as a situational barrier. Two female students in the four-year private college category and one in the community college category reported that their work schedules could be considered a situational barrier, as it impacts their study time.

The narratives also revealed that these ten students experienced a variety of institutional barriers. The five students in the four-year private college category all

reported that the institution's class schedule and the lack of enough night classes impacted their program completion in a negative way. Additionally, some classes listed in the college catalog are not offered. These five women expressed that from their perspectives, this is a serious institutional barrier. There was no one in the community college category that listed the course schedule as being a barrier.

Four of the ten White students reported that the lack of mentors and the fact that the colleges have no support systems in place for nontraditional students had a negative impact on their overall college experience. Of these four women, two attend the community college and two were at the four-year private college. These students believe that a support system could assist them in navigating the higher education process and help to alleviate their anxieties. Further, along with this support barrier, one student in the community college category discussed tutoring as a problem. She felt that tutors should be trained to interact with all students, nontraditional, as well as traditional. After all, nontraditional students had been out of school for over twenty years.

There were five students, two in the community college and three in the four-year private college category, who reported that professors/instructors can be institutional barriers. They interfered with the academic success of students by enticing fears, not respecting their academic potential, and not providing any type of encouragement and/or support. Counseling was a barrier for four students; two attending each institution. They believed that counselors did not understand that the needs of nontraditional students are different from those of traditional students. More flexible hours of operation and a greater sensitivity by counselors were viewed to be beneficial for nontraditional students.

Three of these students reported that parking can be an institutional barrier. For one student at the community college, her work schedule leads to parking difficulties, as most spaces were occupied when she arrived. This was a source of anxiety because walking late into the classroom was not tolerated by many professors. The two women attending the four-year private college were ticketed often because they chose not to park in a lot that is too far from their classroom building. For these women, parking was an institutional barrier.

There were two students in the four-year private college category who reported that the library was a barrier. One reported that she didn't know how to use the library and never looked at the possibility of that being a barrier. (But it is a barrier because she has to make alternative arrangements to use a different library.) The other student discussed that the technology at the library is not adequate and causes too many problems. She feels locked into the college library, and because she lives in an outlying area, feels that the library should provide some options as far as some type of program which she could access on her home computer. This barrier also cuts into her study time as she has to drive 45 miles to the campus, and sometimes the technology does not work. For her, this barrier was very negative as it impacts on her time.

Of these ten White students, there were three women who reported not having any institutional barriers. They cited that counseling has been wonderful, and the professors have been very approachable and encouraging. However, of these three students, one student was among those who complained about the class schedule. Other than that, she had no problems whatsoever with the institutions.

With respect to dispositional barriers, all five of the students in the community college category and four students in the four-year private college category, reported that they do struggle with self-imposed barriers. Eight cited having insecurities and lack of self-confidence about their abilities to be successful college students due to feelings of being “dumb,” “inferior,” and “stupid.” Others were insecure because they were poor students in the past. Although all of these women have been academically successful, they still struggle with issues of self-doubt. One student discussed feeling insecure both academically and personally because of her poor self-image and poor self-esteem about what she “looks” like. There was another student who struggles with guilt feelings and works to overcome those feelings so she can spend her energies on her education. Of these ten students, only one reported having absolutely no dispositional barriers, as she was very confident in her high scholastic abilities. Also, she does not suffer and/or struggle with any type of guilt feelings.

Finally, the researcher asked the ten students whether or not they viewed their religious background as a sense of support to stay focused on their educational goals. It was revealed that nine of these ten students reported that they did, in fact, view their religious and/or spiritual lives as a positive aspect of their support. Some referred to spiritual strength as the reason they remained focused and continued to move towards their goals of a college degree. However, only one student did not provide a comment about religious or spiritual support. Overall, regardless of these women’s experience of support or non-support, institutional and/or dispositional barriers, they have all managed to move beyond the barrier and continually work towards the realization of their dreams of a college education.

The Five Black and Five White Female Students at the Community College

Question #1

Briefly describe your high school experiences.

There were similarities and differences in the experiences of the Black and White students in the community college category. First, there was no one who reported having a “very positive” high school experience. There was another Black student who discussed having a beautiful or “positive” high school experience. Furthermore, she discussed having positive mentoring from the principal of the high school. However, the only negative aspect she experienced centered on attending college after high school. She felt that she was pursuing the educational dreams of her parents and not her own. Also, one White student was the only person who reported having a “very negative” high school experience. She attributed her unpleasant, unfulfilling high school experience to her Christian Reform “dysfunctional” family. She is first generation American and first generation college student; thus, she believes that those factors also had an impact in her negative high school experiences. From her perspective, she had learned to be silent. The lack of mentoring was a constant theme for nine of the Black and White students. With the wisdom of hindsight, they observed that their mentoring relationships during their earlier educational experience, and for some, during their present or current educational experience, was inadequate. Further, of the five Black and five White students, only four reported having positive mentoring relationships in their current situation. The one Black student, who described her experience as “positive,” was the only student who reported having attentive mentors during high school. However, she did not express having positive mentoring in her college experience.

Of the six students who reported that they had “negative” high school experiences, two of the Black students were impregnated in high school. One was in the ninth grade, and the other in the tenth grade. One of these Black students discussed race as an issue, and as she mentioned, race mattered in how students were treated, and she felt inferior. She had no mentors inside the educational setting that reached out to make a positive impact on her schooling experiences. This situation was exacerbated by her father leaving the family, which had a depressing impact on her personally. The other Black student’s negative high school experience revolved around the fact that she was pregnant in the ninth grade and had experienced years of molestation. This was identified as the major cause of her drug use and eventual addiction. She used drugs as an escape from her problems.

Of the five White students, none were pregnant in high school, but three white students reported having negative high school experiences. They believed that their negative experiences centered around family issues, as they did not have supportive mentors inside or outside of their high schools. One of these White students became an alcoholic to escape her dysfunctional family. She expressed that her father was “king,” and everyone had to do what he said or else. To cope with this situation, she learned to live in silence. Her experience was different in that she did not get pregnant while in high school. But like the Black student who eventually turned to drugs to escape her problems, she, too, used alcohol as a means to live with her pain.

There was another White student who reported having family issues and was compared to her older brothers who were considered “smart.” She was considered “dumb” or “average” because she was not viewed as being as “intelligent” as her

brothers. Her parents called her “average” and did not encourage her to attend college; subsequently, she developed low self-esteem and a low sense of self-worth because she was made to believe that she was inferior due to her weight problem and poor academic performance. There was only one White student who reported having a “negative” or abnormal high school experience because she was a poor student. She dropped out of high school, got married, and joined the military with her husband. Further, she discussed being socialized for marriage and domestic life and believed her gender and class status contributed to the lack of mentoring and guidance she experienced. Early marriage was used as a way out for five of these ten students--two Black women and three White women, as each of them married right out of high school.

One of the Black students who experienced high school as “negative” believed that race played a major factor. She believed that Black female students were “tracked” or placed in less challenging curriculum. Because her older siblings were disliked, she was not given a chance to demonstrate her abilities as an individual but was considered as part of a “group.” Additionally, a family problem with her mother led to her moving out of the house after graduation and getting married.

The last student, who reported having a negative experience in high school, mentioned that she only attended high school for about six months. During that six months, she felt invisible. She, too, did not receive any type of mentoring or guidance inside or outside her school environment. Also, like another White student in the community college category, she experienced depression during elementary school and her brief high school career.

The last two students attending the community college—one Black and one White—had ambivalent experiences. The Black student reported that her high school experience was average; it was just school. Her narrative revealed that race was an issue, as well as the pressure she received from her parents to be academically and socially rounded. She was one of the two Black students who graduated from high school with honors and received a full scholarship to a four-year college. Also, she was one of two students who were from a middle-class background with at least one parent with a college degree. Hence, her experience was somewhat unique in that regard. The White participant had transferred to another high school and had a “better” experience academically; therefore, she was on the honor role for one semester for the first time. Although she had experienced some academic success, this still did not make her experience “positive.” Because of her socio-economic status, she was treated differently and did not have mentors. She reflected that only those from middle and upper-class families had mentors, and they were the ones who were encouraged to attend college. She never thought that she had the potential to attend college, as no one ever told her she could.

Of the five Black and five White students attending the community college, two Black students and one White student were second-generation college students. Also, eight of these students—four Black and four White—were from working-class backgrounds. Thus, seven of these students believed that their class status also made an impact on their negative high school experience. Of the five Black female students, four reported that race had a negative impact on how they were perceived and treated within

their high school setting. Three of the Black students experienced triple jeopardy because of intersection of race, class and gender.

Three of the White students experienced issues of gender and class--double jeopardy, and one White student experienced triple jeopardy--ethnicity, gender and class. This student also believed that her ethnicity also made an impact on her negative experience. Not only was she a first generation college student, she was also a first generation American. Therefore, her parents raised her to adhere to the traditions of their home culture.

In sum, these five Black and White students experienced more similarities than differences in their high school experiences, and those similarities revolved around issues of class and gender. The only significant difference was racial/ethnic, as it was further revealed that race still matters significantly in the new millennium. Therefore, the matrix of domination theory will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Question #2

What motivational factors determined your return to college?

The primary and secondary motivational factors of the five Black students did not differ significantly from the five White students attending the community college. Of the ten Black and White students, two White and one Black listed quality of life as their primary reason for returning to college. One Black student and one White student were most interested in pursuing career changes, plus their children were older and no longer needed child care. The White student has two college children, and the Black woman has one child in college, and the other is in middle school. One Black and one White student stated that their primary reason for returning to school was to be a role model and helping

others. Also, the White student was motivated for the sheer purpose of doing something for herself.

Three Black students reported that their primary motivational factors dealt with them wanting to finish what they had started earlier, and that it is now their time to do something just for themselves. Also, there were two other students--one Black and one White--who listed "doing for themselves" as their primary reason for returning to college. There were three students--two White and one Black--who were motivated to return to college because they needed the proper credentials in order to move forward professionally. Finally, one Black student reported that her children were older and were in school all day, and it was now her time.

All ten of these women reported that the convenience of the community college, its cost effectiveness, smaller classrooms--where they can receive one-on-one attention--were secondary factors for their return to college. There was only one White student who reported that she was also motivated to attend the community college because the garden and grounds were beautiful. Overall, regardless of race, age, or social class, these ten students were motivated to return to college for similar reasons.

Question #3

Describe your experience in the classroom setting and discuss which classroom you believe works best for your learning style.

The narratives revealed no important differences in the experiences of the five Black and five White students in the community college category. Although there was a diversity of classroom settings that they all experienced, there were more similarities than differences. For example, all five of the Black students preferred an engaged pedagogy

where they had the opportunity to use their experiential knowledge. Each of them expressed that they value teaching/learning environments where they are allowed to grow and develop beyond their present mindset. They preferred to learn, not just to memorize the material for a test. In that regard, a critical feminist pedagogy would best meet their educational needs. One of the Black students, Journey 38, expressed that she believes that when one has an opportunity for active involvement and participation, it is easier to own your education as it becomes yours and not just concepts and principles one memorizes for the test and then forgets it all later. The other Black students, as well as some of the White students, echoed similar sentiments.

Of the five White students, four of them were consistent with the five Black students attending the community college. They, too, believed that an active, engaged learning environment can translate into greater, more comprehensive learning. However, there was one White student who reported that while she values experiential learning, her preference was for a more traditional lecture-centered format-- one where the teacher can tell her what it is she needs to know in order to pass the test and get a good grade.

The ten Black and White students in the community college category also reported on their present and past classroom experiences, and again, there were more similarities than differences. For the most part, all ten students reported that most of their professors/instructors use a straight lecture format, with minimal or no participation between instructor and students. One White student reported that out of the 17 classes she has had at the community college, she has only had two female professors who used an open, facilitation pedagogy. Further, she expressed that those were the classes that she

learned the most found to be personally transformative. Again, eight other Black and White students in the community college category echoed her sentiments.

These Black and White women have also had teaching/learning environments that were strictly lecture. One Black student reported that most instructors will superficially ask a “what do you think” question, but active participation is not encouraged because generally, the professor structures the classes more toward lectures. There was one White student who reported that her experiences in the classroom at the community college was positive because she preferred the lecture format, with little or no interaction. However, nine Black and White students who prefer a more active teaching/learning environment indicated that their experiences have been both positive and negative. They were more negative when the classroom was more of the traditional setting.

Question #4

As a nontraditional female student do you in anyway feel as though your identity is being silenced by the institution? (Race, gender, social class)

The responses reflected both similarities and differences; however, there were no major or important differences with respect to this factor. Of the ten women in the community college category, there were two Black students who voiced that they felt silenced within the institution, and one woman responded ambiguously both “yes” and “no” in regards to being silenced. Also, of the five White students attending the community college, two reported feelings of being silenced, and one replied “yes” and “no”. An example of this was found in the narrative of one of the five Black students who reported that in the past she had felt silenced and alone. She described her experience as being similar to her earlier education in elementary, junior high and high

school where she had no mentors, as no one took an interest in her. From her perspective, race mattered, and she felt inferior to her White counterparts. But her experience today is much different because, this semester, she has two Black professors--one female and a male. The female professor has become her mentor, and for the first time she is experiencing the support and encouragement she so desired earlier in her educational career. Therefore, she is not experiencing any form of silencing, alienation, or isolation because this semester these professors are giving her what she needs to succeed and excel. On the other hand, the White student in the community college category expressed that because the community college is small, she has not felt silenced. However, on some occasions, she believed she was not acknowledged by a chastising professor who talked down to the students. She believed that was a type of silencing because she was not acknowledged as an adult but was treated as a traditional student.

There were two other Black students and two other White students in the community college category who responded with an enthusiastic "yes," as each of them felt silenced within the institution. The two Black students felt silenced by their race and gender. They did not like being put on the spot to speak for their groups. They were viewed as experts on Black people, and Black women, in particular and, from their perspectives, that is a form of silencing of their identities as individuals, with their own uniqueness and personhood. One of the major factors that bothered the Black students was that, in America, freedom does not really mean free. Their feelings were the result of the hostility within their classroom environment, and they understood the ideology which tells them that "we're all equal." However, that is a myth because there were many times they did not feel that "equality" in their classroom. Consequently, she decided to

remain silent and not actively interact for fear of retaliation because of her ideology. The other Black student, however, did not feel the pressure to conform and be silent. She continually expressed the opinion that often times the professor or the students would disagree with her ideology; however, she was in no way intimidated by their sighs, head nodding, and the like. Her self-confidence and self-awareness in her identity was quite strong.

There were two White students in the community college category who also reported feelings of silence and isolation. For example, one of the White students in this category discussed feeling silenced because of her nontraditional status. From her standpoint, instructors catered to the younger students, especially some males and younger female. Of all of the classes she has taken at this institution, she could only remember two instances with female professors who were positive and inclusive. Further, she felt that way inside the classroom as well as in the bookstore and the library when her needs were ignored for traditional-age students. She felt invisible and isolated as she tried to rationalize her responses as reflections of her insecurities, or is that just the way things are done. The other White student reported that she did not feel silenced or isolated with the female professors. They gave her a sense of security and acceptance. Another form of silencing took place, however, when professors took for granted that she understood something when she did not. She felt that being a nontraditional female student comes with all types of stereotypes and unrealistic expectations.

Further, the Black and White students believed that the traditional discourse silenced them within the classroom setting. They were not given the opportunity to actively participate and use their experiential knowledge in making connections to the

theories, concepts, and principles of a particular subject. These women pointed out that they are interested in learning the subject matter and acquiring an understanding of how the subject relates to their lived everyday experiences. In becoming educated, they can begin to strip off the layers of oppression and begin to liberate themselves from past constraints to their personhood.

Question #5:

What obstacles or barriers make an impact on your academic success (situational, institutional, dispositional)? Note: Within this question, participants also discussed family and religious support.

Again, there were some similarities and differences between the Black and White students in the community college category. Of the ten students, eight reported that they presently experience situational barriers which centers around balancing home, work, and school responsibilities. There were two Black students who reported that they do not have any situational barriers. One woman stated that she has no husband or children, she recently retired, and, thus, has nothing to interfere or deter her from accomplishing her educational goals. The other Black student expressed that she experienced a serious situational barrier at the beginning of her junior year of college; however, presently, she has no situational barriers that impinge on her abilities to move forward towards degree completion.

The students, both Black and White, discussed the support or lack of support they receive from family members. Although many of these students expressed having situational barriers, they also confirmed that their barriers could have prevented them from pursuing their educational desires had it not been for supportive family members. Their husbands, parents, siblings, and neighbors fill in the gap and assist them with child

care responsibilities. This leaves them with the time, and in some cases, the energy, to stay focused on career and their aspirations for growth and development. Although there were nine students who experienced emotional support and encouragement, there was one White student who did not experience much emotional support. She reported that she would receive assistance for child care, but she did not receive emotional support from her parents and siblings. (In fact, she became very emotional during the focus group session as other women were discussing the encouragement and support they received from parents and siblings. She said, "I feel sad, listening to all of you, because no one in my family ever asks me about my schooling. They don't understand why at my age I am doing this. I really miss not having that support from them.") (Desiree 48). Often times it is difficult for traditional family members to understand that education not only gives one options, it also allows women to grow and to realize their full potential. Many women were not socialized to seek this type of growth prior to the sixties and seventies.

A careful review of the narratives also revealed that all of the five Black students continuously expressed how their faith in God was an essential form of spiritual support. The strength they each received from their personal relationships with God gave them the courage to stay focused, even within hostile environments. The question of their religious/spiritual background was a question the researcher had planned to ask all of the participants. However, the Black students never gave the researcher an opportunity to ask the question. Each of the Black women constantly referred to their religious/spiritual support throughout the interview and focus group sessions. They believed that it was their religious/spiritual support that kept them grounded and centered on accomplishing

their education's goals. On the other hand, of the five White women who were asked to respond to their religious support, there was one student who described her church as a situational barrier. When she needed her church and church family, they were not there. The other three White students each expressed that they believed in God and believe that His spirit keeps them from giving up on their hopes and dreams. The last White student did not discuss her religious beliefs, but continuously expressed how blessed she was to have such wonderful support from her family.

Of the five Black and five White students, one Black and two Whites, reported that they did not experience any institutional barriers. In fact, they believe that the institution favored them because they were nontraditional students who were committed to furthering their education. On the other hand, there were four Black students and three White students who expressed that, from their perspectives, the institution put some constraints on their abilities to successfully complete their degree programs. Some of the barriers discussed in the narratives of these seven students included lack of weekend classes, lack of support groups for nontraditional women, lack of positive mentoring programs for nontraditional female students, college procedures, the traditional discourse within their classroom setting, lack of tutoring, and insensitivity of professors in regards to race, gender and age. Also, there were institutional barriers that were discussed in the narratives.

The narratives revealed that of the ten Black and White students, there was only one Black student who reported not having any dispositional barriers. She expressed that she was very confident in her academic abilities and no longer feels guilty about getting pregnant when she attended college earlier. Further, she also expressed having a strong

sense of self in regards to her race and gender and does not feel intimidated by the responses of others. But the other nine women, both Black and White, reported that they struggle with feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and self-doubt. They also expressed that even though they have experienced academic success, they still struggle to overcome their feelings of not being able to finish what they started. They repeatedly stated that they are their own worst critics.

In sum, the findings showed that there was only one important difference in the situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers experienced by these five Black and five White students. This difference centered around their spiritual strength, which has always been a constant theme in the Black community and, surprisingly, emerged as a dominant theme among the White students in this study.

The Five Black and Five White Female Students at the Private Four-year College

Question #1:

Briefly describe your high school experience.

In summary, the narratives revealed that there were similarities and differences between the five Black and five White students attending the four-year private college as it relates to their high school experiences. Some of the major similarities of these ten students center around their social class and location, as nine students classified themselves as either working class or lower class. Also, these nine students were all first-generation college students, and some were first-generation high school graduates. These two factors influenced their expectations regarding attending college after high school. Of these ten students, half of them--four Black and one White--attended college after high school, from one semester to two years. The four Black students who attended college

after high school were encouraged by their parents to attend college as a way out of their present socio-economic status. However, their parents were not able to assist them through the many hurdles associated with acquiring a college education. The White student who attended college after high school was not encouraged by her family; she was self-motivated to go on and to move beyond her working class status.

Some of the differences were that there was only one Black student who categorized herself as middle-class and she was also the only second-generation college student. She, along with a White student, reported having "very positive" high school experiences. However, the difference in their "very positive" experiences was that the Black student was socially and academically successful. She expressed having mentors inside her home and school. On the other hand, the White student was socially accepted, as that was her focus, but she was not academically successful and did not have mentors inside her home or school. There was only one student (Black) who was a high school dropout. She viewed her high school experience as negative because of family problems. In fact, it was because of the problems she had with her mother that she dropped out of high school at age sixteen to work and support herself. Of the ten students, four (one Black and three White) reported having "positive" high school experiences. Of these four students, a White student said that it was "party time"--she wanted to be accepted socially because of her social class. Also, at home she was not receiving very much support or encouragement. Her father worked and drank, and her mother raised the children but allowed her to do what she wanted. So to some degree, she too, was on her own.

The Black student expressed her “positive” experiences as socially fulfilling; and her mother expected her to go to college. She was the only student in the four-year private college category that was raised in a single parent family.

Another White student reported that, due to the time in which she was socialized (1960s and 1970s), women were not expected to attend college, and she was never encouraged to do so. Instead, she went to work and got married, which was expected during that time. Of the ten students, only three mentioned having any type of mentoring. And of these three, only the Black student was encouraged to go on to college. Another difference was that only one student (White) joined the army after high school because she wanted to prove to her family that she could take care of herself.

Other differences were revealed in the experiences of these five Black and five White students. There was only one student (Black) that was a teenage mother, and she reported that high school was a “negative” experience for her and that she was a “low achiever.” Further, she was the only Black student who acknowledged that “race” was an obstacle during her high school experience. She, too, did not have any mentors, but she was one of the students who attended college right after high school. There was only one student (White) who reported having a “very negative” high school experience. She was also the only student who had experienced death of a parent at a early age. She discussed having one mentor who encouraged her interest and abilities in art but did not encourage her to go on to college.

There was another Black student who did not experience high school as negative or positive; she was the only student in the four-year private college category who reported just being “passed” through high school because she was nice. Not unlike most

students, she had no real mentors; however, teachers were “supportive” in just “passing” her through because they liked her.

In sum, there was only one Black student who discussed issues of race and only one White student who discussed gender as an obstacle during high school. The other students did not necessarily “voice” gender and/or racial inequalities; however, there was evidence throughout the interviews and focus group sessions of these factors. Further, there was consistency in their experiences in regards to their class location and the lack of positive mentors. Overall, their similarities and differences had an impact on the quality of their high school lives. The matrix of domination was a consistent finding that will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Question #2

What motivational factors determined your decision to attend college?

The ten students in this category had very similar primary and secondary motivational factors for attending college. Of those ten students, those who had attended college earlier were motivated to finish what they had started. There were four White students who received full or partial tuition reimbursements from their employers; whereas, only two Black students received partial tuition reimbursements from their employers. The need for credentials and career change was a consistent motivational factor for several of the Black and White students. Another consistent motivational factor, which was a primary factor for some of the ten students, as well as a secondary factor for others; centered around the small classroom environment. Because these nontraditional female students attending the four-year private college had been out of the educational arena for a number of years, it was important for them to receive more one-

on-one attention. Therefore, an important primary and secondary motivational factor was small classroom size, as well as convenient campus location. These two institutions fit the criteria for these Black and White students. Their desire “to do something for themselves” was another primary motivational factor that was reported by the majority of these ten students--it is their time to focus on their own goals, to further their own personal growth and development, and at the same time, for some, make a financial difference in the lives of their families.

There were also differences in the motivational factors for these five women. Of the ten female students, there were three students (two Black and one White) who reported that quality of life for their families was one of their primary reasons for attending college. Two of the Black students in the four-year private college category reported that the reputation of the college’s academic programs was one of their primary reasons for attending the college. Further, of the five White students, two of them were motivated to attend because the private college is a part of their religious faith; therefore, they knew that they would feel comfortable and accepted for that reason. The oldest White student in the four-year private college category was also motivated to attend college as she is considering retiring from her employer of over thirty-years; she is planning for a totally different career. In sum, all of these nontraditional students, both Black and White, had more similarities than differences regarding their motivational factors for pursuing higher education.

Question #3

Describe your experience in the classroom setting and discuss which classroom environment works best for your learning style.

The students in the four-year private college category experienced similar classroom settings. All ten of the students reported that they are being educated within environments that are mainly lecture focused with minimum active participation. In some of their social science courses, however, the professors use a combination of a lecture and facilitation classroom environment. But, for the most part, their classroom settings are mainly lecture oriented.

When the question of classroom preference was asked, the ten students differed, in that, all five of the Black students reported that they preferred a more active engaged teaching/learning environment where they can relate the subject matter to their experiential knowledge. Each of these five students believes that an engaged pedagogy allows for more growth and development. In essence, it adds greater depth to their learning. On the other hand, there were only two White students who preferred an active classroom environment. The other three White students valued an experiential, open classroom environment, but they preferred a more traditional, lectured focused classroom because they feel that the professor has the correct knowledge, and they want all the knowledge that the professor could provide. Further, one of these women made the statement that, "...I want to know everything the professor knows, and I want to know it in fifteen weeks."

Also, it was apparent that four of the five Black students were impacted by experiences of racial and gender inequalities within their classroom settings. That is, three Black students felt compelled to revert back to how they were socialized, and they chose to "go along to get along" and did not actively participate within their classroom environments, while two Black students participated regardless if they were made to feel

uncomfortable. One of the Black women believed that one male professor did not grade the nontraditional female students fairly. In fact, he could not understand why older women returned to college. Therefore, his classroom was geared more towards the traditional college students. According to these women, they had paid their money, and they are determined to get the education they deserved. Of the five White students, there was only one who reported having any type of negativity within her classroom environment.

In sum, there were some definite similarities and differences between the classroom preferences of these ten Black and White students. The Black students preferred a more engaged teaching/learning environment, and they reported experiencing more negativity within their classroom environments than their White counterparts.

Question #4

As a nontraditional female do you feel that your identity is being silenced by the institution (race, gender, social class)?

The five Black and five White students attending the four-year private college reported both similarities and differences.. In regards to differences, four Black students reported feeling silenced within their institutional environment due to issues of race and gender. These four Black students discussed an often “chilly” and “hostile” institutional environment where professors, as well as students, interact with them in a negative manner. Three students resigned not to actively participate within their classroom settings. According to one Black student, “If looks could kill, I’d be dead.” Because this four-year private college is a religious college, these Black students did not expect to face racial hostility and, in that regard, had not prepared themselves for that possibility.

Further, they believe that they had let their guards down because they believed that they would be accepted. However, they rather quickly realized that this was not the case—just the opposite. The other Black student did not feel intimidated and refused to be silenced and continued to voice her ideas, thoughts and opinions. Although the fifth Black student did not feel silenced in anyway, she also reported that the institution could not silence her even if they tried. Regardless to how hostile the environment may be, there were two Black students who exhibited a lot of self-confidence about their identities as Black women.

One Black student also believed that she was not only silenced by race, but gender as well. One professor preferred not to interact with nontraditional female students, and he could not understand why they even returned to college. So, from the perspective of this Black female, that is a type of silencing of nontraditional female students, regardless of race. On the other hand, there were four White students who reported just the opposite because they did not feel silenced within the four-year private college. In fact, they expressed that they felt favored by their professors because they were nontraditional students. Similar to the remark made by one of the Black students, a White student also responded that the institution could not silence her even if it tried. Therefore, there were some significant differences in their feelings of being silenced.

There was only one White student who felt silenced. She did not feel silenced by her gender but because the institution was insensitive in recognizing honor students. Further, she reported that she felt like an outsider when she saw the sign for the celebration, “Welcome Parents.” She believed it to be almost like a slap in the face of nontraditional students who worked just as hard, and maybe even harder, due to the many

constraints that nontraditional students face. In that regard, she experienced the sting of being different and not being recognized for her academic accomplishments. Thus, she was, in a sense, silenced.

None of the students who felt silenced by the institution ever advocated or shared their feelings of isolation, alienation, or separation to anyone within the institution, even the other women who chose not to remain silenced regardless of the hostility. In that regard, they too were silenced by the institution.

Question #5:

What obstacles or barriers make an impact on your academic success (situational institutional, dispositional)?

The narratives revealed that there were some similarities and differences in the situational barriers experienced by the five Black and five White students. One major similarity was that all ten of these students, married and single, reported that they have to work at balancing the demands of home, work, and school. Two of the White students are not married, nor do they have children; therefore, they do not struggle with balancing their time with their families. So, in that regard, their situational barriers are limited. Although they do receive support from their families, their families would prefer to support them in marriage rather than school.

There were also more similarities than differences in their views of religious or spiritual support. Seven of the ten students--five Black and two White--discussed their religious and spiritual backgrounds as support.

Each believed that it is God who gives her the strength and courage to move forward in her educational endeavors. Of the other three women, two stated that they

were blessed but did not provide a specific dialogue about their religious support or background. The third woman did not discuss any type of religion, so we don't know whether religion has made a supportive impact in her life or not.

Regarding other barriers, there was only one student--Black-single parent--who reported that her financial issues seem to be the biggest situational barrier that she has to deal with, and her family support is so limited that often times she has to take her child to work with her. There were two Black students who reported that the death of a loved one was a huge situation that impacted their abilities to stay focused on their studies. In fact, one of these students dropped out of her program for close to three years and didn't realize she had been away from her educational endeavors for so long. Of the three married White students in the four-year private college category, two of them reported that their husbands were their biggest situational barrier. That their husbands were not supportive of their educational goals was a factor that impinged upon their emotional stability. One of these women has a younger child, and the husband does nothing to assist her with child care or any other domestic duties. She is totally on her own when it comes to receiving any support from her spouse--emotional or otherwise. In contrast, four of the Black students received a lot of support from their husbands. Many of them reported that they would have lots of situational barriers if their husbands did not pick up their slack and continue to keep things at home running smoothly. For instance, their husbands could prepare meals, chauffeur the children to different sports practices, part-time jobs, etc. They further reported that, had it not been for the support and encouragement they received from their spouses, they could not continue to move forward toward degree completion.

Of the two White students who did not receive support from their spouses, one of them also did not receive any support from her parents, as they are more traditional in male-female gender roles. They believe that she should be focusing on her husband and his wishes instead of her own. Further, these two women were similar in the regard that they, too, like the other eight women, received support from their children, siblings, and some of their parents who supported their desires of a college education for their daughter.

A review of the narratives revealed that the five Black and five White students experienced similar institutional barriers. The institutional barriers that affect their overall college experience include class schedule (not getting classes when you need them), lack of enough night classes, courses listed in the catalog and not offered, library as a barrier, counseling as a barrier, lack of support groups (including no mentoring relationship), professors/instructors as a institutional barrier in reference to the lack of support and encouragement, bookstore hours as a barrier, and parking as a barrier. According to these ten students, nontraditional students have different needs than their traditional counterparts, and the institutions have not addressed those needs. Some examples include; the inflexible counseling hours, financial aid advisors, bookstore hours to accommodate working adults, and no support groups to address the needs of nontraditional students (where is the bookstore, etc.). These were all common institutional barriers that were discussed by the nontraditional female students, regardless of race and/or age.

Where the Black and White students differed were related to the issues of racial hostility, isolation, alienation, and segregation. All five of the Black students reported

that being the only Black person or the only Black female in many of their classes, along with the pressure of trying to measure up, can be exhausting. Four of these Black students reported that the “chilly” and at times “hostile” institutional environment can be an institutional barrier because it affected their ability to successfully participate in their learning environments. They felt the energy coming at them via the sighs, shaking and nodding of heads, whispers and sometimes out-right verbal hostility from students when they try to express their thoughts and feelings about different topics. On many occasions they would not receive any validation from the professors and things would be worse when the professor did not interact with them with respect. Therefore, three of these five Black students made a conscious decision to no longer actively participate in class discussions. They felt that the environment was no longer conducive for them to voice their opinions, ideas, theories, or to share their own stories. Although these students preferred and value an open, facilitative learning environment, they chose to take themselves out of harms way. In this regard, the negativity they experienced made an impact on their abilities to become truly educated.

The narratives also revealed that these Black and White students reported similar dispositional barriers. Nine of these students indicated that when they first returned to higher education, they were nervous and very insecure because they had been out of the educational arena for years. Moreover, many reported that when they were in high school, they were poor students. Some reported that high school fulfilled their social needs, and they did not focus on the academics. There was one White student in the four-year private college category who was very confident in her academic abilities. She has no fears. Further, there were three Black students who reported that they no longer

struggle or fear their abilities to be successful college students. One of these Black women reported that when she attended the community college, they prepared her to be successful at the next level. Therefore, she has no fears or doubts about her academic abilities. However, there were two Black and four White students who reported that they still “struggle” with being able to do the work and to successfully complete their academic programs. Although these women have been successful academically, they reported that they still have insecurities about themselves. Also, of the ten students, four (two Black and two White) struggle with guilt feelings and wonder if they are being selfish in their pursuits for a college degree. In sum, regardless of the external and internal barriers these students face, they still continue to pursue their educational aspirations.

Similarities and Differences: Inter-Racial Summary of the Twenty Nontraditional Female Students

The narratives of the twenty Black and White students revealed that their earlier high school experiences, in some respect, laid the foundation for their present educational experiences. These nontraditional students described their high school experiences as either very positive, positive, average, negative, or very negative. And in some respect, their past educational experiences played a major role in their status as nontraditional female students. What became very evident is that there were more similarities than differences in their past and present educational experiences due to their subordinate status as women within their society. From the Black students’ perspectives, their race overshadowed their other statuses including gender and social class. Therefore, they were not able to focus on and/or understand that they were also oppressed due to their

gender and social class. It is the intersection of all of these factors that together impacted their high school experiences. Of the ten Black students, two were socialized in a middle-class, two-parent family and were also the only students, Black or White, who graduated from high school with honors. Also, they both received academic scholarships to college. The other eight Black female students were raised in working-class backgrounds, and two of them were socialized in single-female headed households. Also, in this category of women, seven attended college after high school, from two months to two years. The opposite was true for the majority of the White students, as they believed that their social class location placed them outside of those White students who were from the middle and/or upper middle-class families. Again, this factor overshadowed their gender location. There were two White students who acknowledged that their high school experiences were in line with the cultural tradition of not encouraging girls to attain higher education. It was customary for them to pursue marriage as their ultimate goal in life. Further, their families encouraged them to get jobs and get married, which they did. This ideology was also true for both Black and White students in that, of the twenty students, five Black and four White students married after high school. Thus, buying into the ideology of marriage as an answer to all of their problems. Also, of the White students, only three attended college after high school for one semester to two years.

Their narratives also revealed that as a consequence of their race, gender, and social class, they experienced feelings of isolation, alienation, separation, and invisibility, as well as low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence. These feelings were a result of their lack of guidance inside and outside of the high school. For the majority of these

twenty students, only three female students reported receiving any type of encouragement from their high school--two Black and one White. The other seventeen female students did not receive any encouragement from their high school teachers or guidance counselors. Further, eight of the Black female students were encouraged by their parents to seek higher education as a way out of their present working class and oppressive existence. In comparison, there were only three White students who were encouraged to go on to college. This was one important difference in the experiences of these twenty nontraditional female students.

Further, the narratives revealed that ten (six Black and four White) of these students experienced adolescent trauma during the time they attended high school. There was one Black and one White student who experienced such trauma that they resorted to the use of alcohol or other drugs to ease the pain and suffering they both experienced. Three of the Black students experienced early pregnancies that further impacted their negative high school experiences. However, no one in the White category experienced teenage pregnancy. Also, three of these women experienced family pressures, so much so that one Black student dropped out of high school in order to support herself. These issues, along with what was happening in high school, placed such constraints on them emotionally, they are still overcoming their experiences. Many cried during the interviews and focus group sessions. Thus, the lack of guidance and/or mentoring was a major issue for the majority (18) of these students. Although the other eight female students did not experience any type of adolescent trauma, they emphasized the lack of guidance/mentoring and the negative impact it made on their education which lead them to be nontraditional college students.

There were also similarities and differences in the reliance on their religious and spiritual support. All of the Black students expressed how their spiritual belief have always been an important source of support throughout their lives. This acknowledgement is consistent with the African American cultural tradition of relying on their omnipotent God as a form of support or encouragement to survive difficult situations. In comparison, the White students did not volunteer any information about their religious or spiritual backgrounds until the question was specifically posed to them. However, several indicated that their religious background was a form of support.

All twenty nontraditional female students were motivated to return to post-secondary education for similar reasons. Therefore, there were no differences in why they chose to attend college as adult students. Further, the majority of these students--nine Black and eight White--prefer educational environments that respected and valued their experiential knowledge. In other words, they preferred andragogy or a more engaged pedagogy where they are allowed to actively participate in the teaching/learning process. They believed they had life experiences which were useful in educational discussions. In other words, they were interested in assuming a new role which had not been encouraged in the past because of their matrix of domination or race, class and gender locations.

Many of these students have been silenced for so long that during the interviews and focus group sessions they spoke at length. This was their time to express themselves without interruptions--to use their own words and voices. Whether they attended a community college or a private four-year college, several of these Black and White students experienced silencing within the institution. For example, students became very

emotional when one of the White students, who is attending the community college, told her story. She said, "I am forty-one years old and now it is OK to speak, to use my voice, to express how I have been feeling for years, and it feels good." She was the woman who had a negative high school experience because she had learned to be silent at home as they were not allowed to speak. Her father had to have things his way, and no one would listen to what she had to say or believed her when she did speak. However, her first experience attending the community college was a positive one because she had one professor who allowed students to be reflexive and share their experiences. This was a transforming experience for her. There were many other students who voiced similar sentiments.

Although some of these students were allowed to speak in the home, the institution silenced them because of race, gender, and/or social class. There was a Black student in the community college category who reported that during her high school days, the principal blocked everything she tried to do because of her negative experiences with her siblings. This was a form of silencing as she was not viewed as an individual but part of a "group." Since she was viewed as part of a racial, gender, and social class "group," she was placed in a less challenging academic curriculum which silenced her so much that she was not academically prepared when she did decide to attend college. She was the student who didn't have biology or algebra in high school. Similar to her White female counterpart attending the community college, she, too, had a positive experience upon her return to the community college. She used words like "blessed" because she had two Black professors who gave her security, encouragement, and an opportunity to learn in an experiential classroom setting. Further, she reported that the Black female

professor had become a mentor, something she had never had before. This was an empowering experience for her--the first time in her thirty-eight years someone she didn't know actually was concerned about her academic success. These two students, one Black and one White, discussed openly how their high school and/or family had silenced them, but their post-secondary environment empowered them to move beyond the silencing to varying levels of liberation. Each of these two students had no mentors or guidance in high school. Because of their race/ethnic group, gender and/or social class, they were not taken seriously, and in that regard, they were passed over and ignored. There were others who voiced similar experiences, but these two specifically discussed their silencing in high school, which they did not experience the semester they returned to higher education. There were other students--four Black and five White--who did not feel silenced in anyway by the institution. They felt that the institution favored them because of their nontraditional status. Further, they expressed having counselors, administrators, and several teachers who were very supportive and encouraging, and in that regard, they felt accepted and a part of their institutions.

There was a total of six Black and five White students who believed that they were silenced by the institution. In varying degrees, they felt isolated, alienated, separated, and made not to feel a part of the institution because of their race, gender and/or age. The White students believed that it was the fact that they were nontraditional that they felt silenced by the institution. This made one of the White students feel very uncomfortable, as she was made to feel that she didn't deserve to celebrate her accomplishments like the traditional students. Other White students felt that, as nontraditional students with jobs and other responsibilities, the college does not

accommodate them by extending the hours of the bookstore, counseling, and financial aid offices. They felt less important than the traditional students, even after they did things right and in order. One of these White students believed that the instructors can silence you when they do not communicate and discuss your progress, but assume that because you received a B, that's enough. From this person's perspective, that has been a form of silencing because she is still not sure about herself academically. Yet, several White students believe that female instructors did not silence their identities as nontraditional female students. In fact, they empowered them and allowed them to grow. The opposite was true with many of the male instructors who were found to be condescending and not willing to assist them to reach their full academic potential.

In contrast, the Black students who felt silenced by the institution, attributed it to the fact that they are Black and that their race places them on the outside of their institution. In fact, they felt silenced by some female instructors, as well as the male instructors. Similar to the White students, Black students were so overshadowed with their oppression as it related to their race, they could not begin to understand the interconnection of race and gender inequalities. Of the Black students, four of them made a conscious decision to silence themselves because of the open hostility and negativity they received within their classroom environments. They felt that their experiences were not validated by the White instructors and were treated with disrespect by the White students. Therefore, from their perspectives, their education was hindered to a large degree as they were not able to experience real learning. They did not feel comfortable expressing their ability to comprehend the subject matter; they relied on notes to memorize and pass the test. Therefore, they were not learning as much as they

desired. Their race was a factor that silenced them, and in essence, disrupted their ability to learn. Their race once again, had oppressed them as it did when they were attending high school. They were not able to move beyond their past oppressive educational experiences to reach empowerment and transformation nor to reach their full academic potential. Moreover, because of the “chilly” campus environment, many did not actively seek out counseling but followed the academic programs as outlined in the college catalog.

Those who expressed feelings of silence and invisibility further felt that their institutions constrained their sense of self-worth, and they felt isolated, “lonely” and detached from the institution. As one Black women stated, “I’m going with the flow and doing what I have to do to get my degree.” This was, essentially, the sentiment for all of those students, both Black and White, who felt silenced by the institution. Of the six Black students who felt silenced, only two felt comfortable enough, with their identities as Black women, to not let the “chilly” and/or “hostile” environment lower their spirits. Nor did they let the “chilly,” and sometimes “hostile” environment deter them from actively participating within their classroom. They were able to transcend the pettiness and use their own words and voices; they were not willing to just go with the “flow.” They were not in anyway intimidated by White instructors and/or White students because they felt that they deserved to have their voices heard. They each indicated that no one could silence them even if they tried. This attests to their comfort in their self-identity. However, none of the students, Black or White, who felt this silencing, confronted the institution or advocated for any type of change. In reference to the issue of silencing by the institution, there were more similarities than differences, as both Black and White

students felt silenced by their institution. In short, “race matters” and appears to be just as overpowering as it has always been; and the insidious disabling connection between race, gender and social class—still is not properly recognized and understood by either Black or White female nontraditional students.

Finally, there were similarities and differences in the situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers experienced by these twenty students. The majority of these students experienced some type of situational barrier which included, but were not limited to, balancing work, home and family responsibilities. Many revealed that finding enough time to study is a constant situational barrier that they continually work to overcome. Also, several of these students experienced positive support from their families that helped them handle the situational barriers, other than having to work. In many instances, their husbands, parents, children, and siblings take up the slack and make their lives more manageable. However, there were some students (four White) who viewed their families as barriers because of their lack of support and encouragement. One of the single participants voiced that her parents would rather support her getting married over a college education, especially her mom. Two White students received no support from their husbands, and they viewed their husbands as their biggest situational barrier or obstacle. The last of these White female students viewed her parents as barriers. She revealed that neither of her parents supported her career choice and felt that she didn’t have what it takes to be a college student.

The Black students appeared to be more dependent on their spiritual beliefs as a source of strength to help overcome obstacles, barriers, and challenges they are faced with in their everyday lives. None of the Black women had to be asked about their

religious or spiritual lives; they freely volunteered their religious experiences and the supportive impact on their lives. This factor tied them closely to the African American cultural tradition of relying on God to transcend any situation. In contrast, there were some White students who did not respond to the question on religious support. Yet, there were several who responded to the question and believed that it was because of their spirituality or religion that they were able to stay focused on their goals of a college education. Thus, their responses were similar to those of the Black students in this study. In reference to their situational barriers, family and religious support system, all twenty students--both Black and White-- had more similarities than differences.

Also, these twenty nontraditional Black and White students revealed some similar experiences in regards to their institutional barriers. The difference was the issue of "race," which affected the Black women so much that they could not easily focus on whether or not gender, age, and/or social class made an impact on their institutional barriers. Other than that dynamic, these twenty students experienced similar institutional barriers which included, but were not limited to, a lack of an adequate number of night or weekend classes, scheduling of classes, etc. And, finally, with respect to their dispositional barriers, the majority of these students--six Blacks and nine Whites--experienced different forms of dispositional barriers, from feelings of guilt to not being able to succeed academically. In sum, the narratives revealed one important similarity among all twenty students. Regardless of their earlier educational beginnings, or whatever issues they are faced with today, they are all moving forward in the pursuit of a "dream deferred" to complete their education, and they are "doing it their way."

In sum, the narratives revealed that regardless of race, gender, age, and/or social class, these nontraditional female students were able to rise above the different issues that plagued their past, as well as their future, educational endeavors. Each of them, in their own way, made a conscious decision to move forward in the pursuit of a “dream deferred” to complete their education, and they are “doing it their way” and on their “own terms.”

TABLE I

Demographics Black Community College Participants

1.	Dionne' 38 Married 2 Children Sophomore/Junior Education Part-time student Self-employed Religious Affiliation \$66,000-\$75,000 Paying for college Father H.S./unskilled Mother/technical class (deceased) Studies 5-10 hours per week	2.	Journey 39 Married 3 Children Sophomore/Junior Education Full-time student Unemployed Religious Affiliation \$46,000-\$55,000 Paying for college Father/not sure Mother LPN Degree/Nurse Studies 5-10 hours per week	3.	Maya 26 Married 1 Child Sophomore/Junior Criminal Justice Full-time student Employed Part-time Religious Affiliation \$35,000-\$45,000 Scholarship/self Father H.S./unskilled Mother LPN Degree/Nurse Studies 11-15 hours per week
4.	Natasha 38 Divorced 3 Children (2 at home) Sophomore Psychology Full-time student Unemployed Religious Affiliation Financial Aid Father less than H.S./blue collar Mother less than H.S./blue collar Studies 11-15 hours per week	5.	Esther 53 Divorced No Children Sophomore/Junior Education Full-time student Retired/Employed Part-time Religious Affiliation Paying for college Father less than H.S./unskilled/retired Mother less than H.S./unskilled/retired Studies 11-15 hours per week		

TABLE II

Demographics White Community College Participants

1.	Janet 41 Married 2 Children (in college) Non-Degree Seeking Psychology/Sociology Part-time student Unemployed No Religious Affiliation \$46,000-\$55,000 Paying for college Father less than H.S./unskilled (deceased) Mother less than H.S./retired/unskilled Studies 11-15 hours per week	2.	May 44 Married 5 Children Sophomore/Junior Psychology/Sociology Full-time student Unemployed Religious Affiliation \$36,000-\$45,000 Financial Aid Father BA degree/Professional Mother less than H.S./managerial Studies 35 hours per week	3.	Samantha 26 Divorced 1 Child Sophomore Social Work Part-time Employed Full-time Religious Affiliation \$11,000-\$15,000 Partial employer reimbursement Father trade school/technical Mother H.S./managerial Studies 5-10 hours per week
4.	Desiree' 48 Married 3 Children (2 at home) Sophomore Business Part-time student Employed Full-time No Religious Affiliation \$36,000-\$45,000 Full tuition reimbursement Father less than H.S./truck driver Mother less than H.S./housewife	5.	Candie 40 Married 2 Children (1 at home) Sophomore Social Work/Sociology Full-time student Unemployed Religious Affiliation \$66,000-\$75,000 Paying for college Father less than H.S./real estate Mother less than H.S./Factory (deceased)		

TABLE III
Demographics Black Four-year Private College Participants

1.	Ophelia, 37 Divorced 1 Child Sophomore Sociology Full-time student Employed Full/Part-time Religious Affiliation \$26,000-\$35,000 Financial Aid Father HS/Unskilled Mother HS/Nurses Aide	2.	Sarah, 26 Married 4 Children Junior Education Part-time student Employed Full-time Religious Affiliation \$36,000-\$45,000 Financial Aid/Employer Reimbursement Father/Trade School/Semi-skilled/Retired Mother Graduate Degree/Professional	3.	Sylvia, 45 Married 2 Children (Adults) Senior Sociology Part-time student Employed Full-time Religious Affiliation \$36,000-\$45,000 Full Employer Reimbursement Father less than HS/Unskilled Mother less than HS/Unskilled
4.	Meleka, 40 Married 5 Children Senior Criminal Justice Part-time student Religious Affiliation \$46,000-\$55,000 Employed Full-time Religious Affiliation Paying for College Father less than HS/Labor Deceased Mother less than HS/Unskilled	5.	Lori, 35 Married 2 Foster Children Junior/Senior Education Full-time student Religious Affiliation \$46,000-\$55,000 Employed Full-time Religious Affiliation Paying for College Father/not sure Mother less than HS/unskilled		

TABLE IV
Demographics White Four-year Private College Participants

1.	Leslie, 41 Married 5 Children Senior Sociology Part-time Employed Full-time No Church Affiliation \$66,000-\$75,000 Paying for College Reimbursement/Self Father HS/Unskilled Mother HS/Correspondence course/Managerial	2.	Alexandria, 48 Married 2 Adult Children Sophomore Liberal Arts Part-time Employed Full-time Religious Affiliation \$66,000-\$75,000 Full Employer Reimbursement Father less than HS/Retired/Unskilled Mother HS/Retired Telephone Operator	3.	Beth, 40 Single None Junior Liberal Arts Part-time Employed Full-time No Church Affiliation \$26,000-\$35,000 Partial Employer Father HS/Managerial Mother HS/Managerial
4.	Sharon, 44 Married 2 Children College Senior Sociology/Theology Part-time Employed Full-time Religious Affiliation \$66,000-\$75,000 Academic Scholarship/Self Father HS/Unskilled Mother HS/Unskilled	5.	Amy, 35 Single None Sophomore Business Part-time Employed Full-time Religious Affiliation \$26,000-\$35,000 Partial Employer Reimbursement/Scholarship Father HS/Skilled/Deceased Mother less than HS/Unskilled/Homemaker Deceased		

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The major focus of this study was conducted to understand the experiences of nontraditional undergraduate women and to ascertain their preferred educational classroom environments--pedagogy or andragogy. It was crucial for the researcher to understand their secondary school experiences along with the issues and challenges they encountered and how those experiences impact their present educational endeavors. Also, this study investigated their social class background, personal motivational factors, self-identity, mentoring, family support, and religious factors, as well as any perceived barriers (situational, institutional, and dispositional) that had an impact on their academic success.

The researcher analyzed their stories as expressed in their own voices as nontraditional female students using the work of Malcolm Knowles and his concept of andragogy--the art of teaching adults, Brookfield's concept of facilitation, and Freire's concept of liberatory education. Further, their stories were also analyzed using various feminist versions of women's ways of knowing (refer to Chapter II – Literature Review), along with the ideology of allowing women to “voice” and to speak about their own experiences. Specifically, how issues of domination, power and oppression structured these women's stories and how these issues made an impact on their academic lives individually and collectively as women. Further, as the researcher, I was interested in discussing if the experiences of these nontraditional female students were similar to those that I have experienced as a nontraditional student going from the associate degree through the Ph.D. degree.

This chapter presents an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and conclusions. Due to the nature of this dissertation study, the findings and interpretation can only be generalized to the present sample population and not nontraditional female undergraduate students in general. Also, the stories of these women were from their memories and interpretations; and as such were accepted as reliable and valid because of the importance the women attached to their interpretations of becoming and coming into their own. The discussion of the results of this study was derived from the research questions that established the framework for this study (see Appendices for the list of research questions).

While investigating their individual and collective experiences, several common themes emerged as these students reflected on their secondary and present educational experiences. The women in this study experienced societal and family expectations that often times overshadowed their own personal ambitions. These women all made life decisions based on the influences of their family social class background, and their secondary school experiences. In many instances, due to the lack of adult mentoring and guidance, they often “tripped” into the life choices they made and often times by accident. In this regard, the social forces surrounding them shaped their life choices. Also, during the interviews and focus group sessions they discussed in detail their experiences within their respective institutions of higher education. These common themes will be fully discussed in this chapter.

Influences of Social Class, Race, and Gender at the Secondary Level

The findings showed what schooling was and was not for these twenty Black and White female nontraditional students. Their stories revealed what secondary schooling was like for them including their successes as well as their failures. From their perspectives, their high school experiences were filled with issues of oppression, isolation, frustration, and a lack of self-worth associated with various personal and social issues. Sixteen of these nontraditional women, eight Black and eight White came from similar lower and/or working class backgrounds; in this regard they brought with them varying forms of “cultural capital.” What Bourdieu refers to as advantages or disadvantages based on socio-economic status. Bourdieu’s theory of “cultural capital” articulates that those individuals from lower, working, middle and upper class backgrounds are endowed with various amounts of “cultural capital” that either enhances or devalues their experiences within educational settings. Those individuals who possess the proper language skills and other dominant cultural values experience more positive and productive educational environments. I also believe that the concept of “cultural capital” can include one’s race and gender location.

In this regard one’s race, gender, and social class could be interpreted as being a form of “cultural capital” or a part of a specific “habitus.” In Bourdieu’s (1987, 1986, 1977) discussion of “cultural capital” he refers to the different habitus individuals can arbitrarily be assigned to, based upon their position within society. Individuals who share similar conditions based on their group location, strata, and class take on the same habitus. In essence, he assumes that the same conditions of living individual experience

and the same positions they share in society give rise to the same habitus. Because nontraditional women in this study share similar race, social class locations, gender, and life experiences, from my perception they occupy similar habitus that influence their educational experiences.

The results showed that from the perspective of the lower, working and some middle-class women, their high school experiences were filled with issues of oppression, isolation, and frustration, and a lack of self-worth due in part to their race, class and/or gender. The impact of “cultural capital” and its affect on adult women was found in Luttrell’s (1997) study on adult continuing education female students. She found in her study that the women experienced “childhood experiences of exclusion, difference, and illegitimacy in school” (pg. 5). These were all experiences in varying degrees reported by the students in the present study. Also, this present study was consistent with the study, *Learning the Hard Way* (1989), edited by the Taking Liberties Collective, which revealed the stories of fifty-seven adult women from different race/ethnic groups, social class, and sexual orientations. In this study, as in the present, the women reflected on their past experiences and the impact it made on their lives. A particular quote cited in the text was very consistent with the feelings of the majority of the Black and White female nontraditional students in this present research study.

Looking back on our school days, for most of us it was a painful and destructive experience, particularly for those of us who had expected something more and who believed that education could give us wider opportunities--a route to achieving a better life. For those of us wise enough to expect nothing, our expectations were amply fulfilled, for nothing was what we got. However, most of us left feeling like personal failures in a system that required the failure of most of us. School was a sentence to be gotten through, an exercise in meaninglessness and futility, cynically perpetrated upon us by teachers whose roles amounted to little more than caretaking, wanting as little aggravation from us as possible, writing most of us off as a waste of their time (pg. 63).

As I read the quote above and reflected upon the stories of the Black and White female nontraditional students in this study, the words seemed to blend together as though there was one voice instead of many different voices. It appears that not much has changed in the experiences of female students. This quote signified the high school experiences of the majority, sixteen of the women in this study, as they experienced varying forms of being “written off.” Due to their race, class, and/or gender location they were not held to the same standards as those from the middle and upper classes. The findings also showed that they experienced environments of low to no expectations, as they did not have any positive mentoring and/or guidance that would have assisted them in reaching their full academic potential. For example many of the Black women expressed that they were “tracked” in less challenging curriculums, or they were passed on through the grades because they were “nice.” The White participants reflected that those from the middle and upper classes were expected to be good students and go to college. Many did not realize that they had the academic potential to attend college because no one told them they could. None of these women understood at the time that they were attending high school, why they were treated differently from their peers. However, as they reflected back on their high school experiences it became apparent to them that their race, social class and/or gender impacted what schooling was and was not.

Another factor that was realized in this study and was also apparent in the studies reviewed is that Black women are overwhelmed by the race problem (question), and the issues of social class overwhelm White women. It becomes difficult for them to focus on and understand that race, and gender as well as social class equally oppresses them. From my perspective, what makes it difficult for some of us is that once we reach middle

or upper-class status, we still find ourselves at a disadvantage because of the stigma of race and/or gender, which frequently overshadows the accomplishments one has aspired to achieve.

The authors do not give a specific date as to when these voices were first recorded or written. The only date listed was the publication date of 1989. This tells those of us who are educators that the schooling experiences of girls and women only appear to have changed over the last few decades. When we get beneath the surface and peer into the depths of progress, we find contradictions in what is being said about the equality of schooling (for everyone) versus what is actually taking place (as reported by the voices of women participating in educational settings). Although, I realize that the voices of the twenty female nontraditional students in this study and those of the studies mentioned above cannot be generalized to the larger population; they do, however, provide insight into problems and issues associated with educating female students. Further, the past schooling experiences of the Black and White women in this study and those listed above, in some regards, have also become my words. Because I, too, fit within the context of their experiences, as their experiences are but a “mirror reflection” of my own.

Black and White feminists have emphasized the invisibility of both Black and White women, and how we have been socialized not to recognize the interconnection of race, class and gender. An early White feminist also observed this separation in 1860, Elizabeth Cardy Stanton made this observation in “Prejudice against color, of which we hear so much, is no stronger than that against sex” (Chafe, 1977, pg. 44). Deborah King (1988) in her article, *Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Thought*, discusses multiple forms of oppression, and Patricia Hill Collins

(1990), another Black feminist theorist, conceptualized these three systems of oppression as the “matrix of domination.” Regardless of the concept one chooses to use, the idea is that all of these distinctive systems of oppression are a part of one central structure, and that is the structure of domination. Feminists of many races and ethnic groups use these concepts and/or theories to understand the experiences of women and the significance of how these multiple, interconnecting layers of oppression affect women inside and outside of academe. What is a consistent factor among the Black and White female students in this study is that they could not recognize the interconnection of these three systems. It was also apparent that the Black and White nontraditional female students in this study had a tendency to identify with one of the three forms of oppression--race, gender, and/or social class--as influences on their educational experiences. They did not, however, understand that all three of these factors are systematically linked to power and/or the political struggles.

Also, this ideology was consistent with Luttrell’s (1997) study on working class women and the study published by the Taking Liberties Collective, *Learning the Hard Way* (1989). The women in these studies also did not understand how issues of race, class and gender could be interwoven as they focused on one or the other. The women in the present study chose, race, gender, class or age as the overarching cause of the inequalities they experienced both in high school and within the walls and halls of higher education.

It appears that the White students could not see beyond their social class location because they have aligned themselves with White males and because of their privileged class status within the dominant society. It appears that the only factor that puts them on

the periphery and/or margin of their White privilege was their social class location. In this context, the question of gender oppression is repressed. The situation for the Black students was both similar to and different than those of the White students. They, too, could not see the connection between being both Black and female as they were overwhelmed with feelings of oppression and discrimination because of their racial identity. Therefore, it was almost impossible for them to see that their gender struggle (position) as Black women were one and the same in some ways as that of the White women. Further, this is a consistent pattern that was found throughout the study and will be repeated as I summarize the findings.

Guidance and/or Mentoring

Mentoring was a constant theme that emerged from the rich description of the lived experiences of these Black and White students. Daloz (1986), author of *Effective Teaching and Mentoring*, believes that education is a transformational journey where mentors act as guides. “They embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers, and point out unexpected delights along the way” (p. 177). Further, Daloz (1986) goes on to point out that mentors, “express care for students by engendering trust, issuing challenges, providing encouragement, and offering visions for the journey” (p. 30). Only a small number of these Black and White students experienced some form of positive mentoring inside and/or outside of their high school setting. There were two Black students from middle-class backgrounds who expressed that they had teachers, and/or counselors who encouraged and assisted them to reach their full potential. Further, they each had at least one parent who was college educated, and that factor added to their successful transition from high school to college. Both of these

Black female students discussed that their mothers were their mentors as they provided positive support and encouragement for them to be successful--socially, culturally and academically. These two Black women graduated from high school with honors and received full academic scholarships for college. Also, there was one Black female and three White female students from working-class backgrounds who expressed that they had either an administrator or teacher who provided some type of positive mentoring. The two White students were encouraged to take specific honors courses, and one of the Black students was encouraged by her principal to pursue her goals. A counselor befriended the other Black student when she became pregnant in the ninth grade. Although these four students received some type of support and guidance from their schools, only the two Black students were encouraged by their parents to attend college. They enrolled in college, but they shortly dropped out either for employment and/or marriage. The two White students were not encouraged by their parents to attend college, and they both took the traditional route and married after high school graduation.

The literature further shows that positive mentoring can provide students with the necessary guidance and encouragement that can prove to be a major component to academic success (Williams, 2001; Woods, 2001; Daloz, 1999; Moayed, 1999, Bagilhole 1994; Ashton-Jones and Olson, 1994, and Hulbert, 1994). The literature further describes mentoring as a primary relationship between teacher and student that focuses on positive interaction that can assist in shaping students sense of self-worth, motivation, and academic achievement. This component was missing for the majority--seven Black and five White--of the female students in this research study. Time and time

again, these students expressed the fact that they lacked “guidance” either within the school setting or in their homes, or both.

The findings showed that there were nine White and three Black students who did not receive encouragement from their families. Further, many of these students believed that positive guidance or mentoring from their families could have made a difference in their nontraditional student status. According to one Black student, “If I had positive guidance in my life, we would not be having this conversation.” From this student’s perspective, if her family situation had been different, her educational experiences could have been more positive, and maybe she would not be a nontraditional student. Those students who lacked positive guidance and/or mentoring in high school held to their perception that teachers and administrators did not care about them. Black women believed that they were stereotyped because of their race, and White women felt that their issues centered on their social class and gender. “...falsification of race relations make it appear as if teachers’ individual prejudice, rather than institutional racism, undermined black students’ success” (Luttrell, 1997, pg. 85). The White students attributed their lack of guidance or mentoring to their lower social class; that is, “those students with more money and whose parents went to college had the mentors.”

A White student who said, “All of the teachers would compare me to my brothers” illustrates the class/gender issue rather convincingly. “I had four brothers, and I was considered the dumb one.” Also, she reported that the teachers would harass her and make her feel uncomfortable in the class and would compare her to her brothers in front of the entire class. She, therefore, perceived that because she was not considered “smart,” she did not receive the necessary support and/or guidance to pursue college as

an educational goal. Furthermore, her parents did not encourage her to pursue college because they thought that she was too quiet and not as outgoing as her brothers.

A Black student who lacked the support of her school and family pointed out the issue of race as a barrier. She said that: "All of the Black students were placed in the easy courses--typing, clerical skills, and vocational kinds of classes." Further, she also reported that she did not take classes that were the norm until she started going to college. Thus, the lack of proper guidance did not prepare her for college. To further complicate matters, a family problem arose which caused her to move out of the home. She did not understand that because she was not living at home she still could have used her financial aid to attend a four-year college. From her perspective, because of the lack of mentoring and guidance that she received from home and school, she got married. Because of this lack of guidance at home and school, many of these female students married right after high school or within one to two years later--six Black and seven White. Also, the findings showed that these Black and White female students were able to answer honestly that they are survivors as they continue to work through the fragmented and often "broken pieces" of their lives.

Although some of these students had at least one teacher, administrator or counselor as a positive mentor, some of them were not encouraged to pursue college as a goal. This finding was once again consistent as half of the twenty students--three Black and seven White-- did not attend college after high school, even those who had positive mentors. However, those students who were from working class and poor backgrounds, as well as those students who were Black, believed that their teachers thought they were not going places because of their social class, race and/or gender. Therefore, the majority

of them received limited guidance and/or mentoring from school officials--teachers, counselors, etc. Many were not encouraged to go to college because they were perceived as not having the necessary skills to be serious students. Thus, they did not receive the attention that could have contributed to their school success. Some of them were "tracked" and placed in alternative, less challenging programs; others were passed on because they were "nice," and still others tried to become social butterflies to be accepted due to their lower social status. Other high school students were not encouraged to meet their full potential because they were from the wrong side of the "tracks." Further, the majority of them were encouraged to get "good" jobs and get married, as that was what they were socialized to do, both in school and within their respective families.

Finally, what was different about these two groups of women? The Black students were encouraged to go to college by their parents but received little or no financial support, and the majority of the White students were not encouraged to pursue college as a goal. But, because the Black parents were not college educated, and some did not have high school diplomas they were not able to navigate their children through the postsecondary education process. They did understand, however, that a college education could assist in moving their children beyond their working and lower class status. Plus, many of these students were not academically prepared to successfully compete within academe. Further, the majority of these twenty students--eight Black and nine White--were first generation college students, and this factor also put them at a disadvantage and impacted their abilities to transition from high school to college.

Another factor that was revealed in the narratives of these twenty nontraditional women was that not only did the majority of them not have mentors during high school,

many of them (seven Black and seven White) do not have mentoring relationships in their higher education institutions. The majority of them believe that younger students have mentors and nontraditional students like themselves do not. Two Black and two White females attending the four-year private college look up to their female professors, and one Black woman had both a male and female professors as mentors. They believe that the relationships they have developed with these professors have assisted them in moving forward in their pursuit for college degrees. There was three Black nontraditional women who have family members that they look up to for encouragement, advise and support. One White female student attending the community college discussed having a mentor who is not aware that she is her mentor. She viewed the only female dean as a mentor because she respected the fact that she started at the bottom like herself, and sees her as a role model that keeps her focused on her long-range goals of a college education. Five of the nontraditional women attending the community college, who are first generation college students, have sought me out as a mentor. Because they each know that I have always been a nontraditional student, they feel comfortable seeking out my advise, and guidance in negotiating their way through the higher education process. Per the literature reviewed mentoring is the best way of providing nontraditional women with encouragement, and to offer them "vision" for the journey.

In sum, the twenty Black and White students in this study were consistent with the current literature as it relates to the effects of socio-economic class, race, and/or gender as influential factors in their positive and/or negative high school experiences. Also, this study was consistent with the literature on the importance of positive mentoring relationships that can assist women both in negotiating their way through the maze of

secondary as well as higher education. However, there were some important differences between the Black and White students as it related to their family support and encouragement to pursue college as a means for upward mobility. The experiences of these twenty Black and White students were very compatible with my own background over thirty years ago.

From my perspective, not much has changed in the experiences of Black and White women within the education arena. As a product of a Black, working-class family, I had no mentors, no guidance, or encouragement to attend college after high school. I can remember, as if it were yesterday, a counselor telling me, “Bev, you would be lucky if you made a good secretary.” Therefore, I understand the hesitation, frustration, fear, and failure of some of the women who tried college after high school. In sum, some of my domain assumptions were both met and not met. On the one hand, I did not believe that much had changed since I attended high school in regards to race, class and gender on issues of inequalities. However, because of white “privilege” I had assumed that White women would have had better experiences than their Black “sisters.” The findings showed that women, regardless of race, class and gender, continue to suffer equally, as they all experienced feelings of isolation, alienation, and marginalization.

Extreme Patterns of Abuse

The narratives revealed some extreme patterns of abuse suffered by the women during their high school experiences, which caused some of them to adopt abusive behaviors. One Black woman was molested over a long period of time, which resulted in her turning to drugs as an escape mechanism. From her perspective, she did not have anyone to really confide in and the molestation occurred over a period of several years.

A White student, who also experienced high school as not being a good experience, discussed using alcohol as a means of escaping her dysfunctional home environment. Her alcoholism was not a short encounter as she looked for acceptance at school. The results also showed that she was too confused to try college, as she was trying to find herself and where she fit in within her social world. These patterns of extreme abuse go beyond the scope of the literature reviewed for this study and are viewed as an area for future research.

Early Marriage

Six Black and seven White nontraditional women from lower-working class backgrounds married immediately or shortly after high school. What the results showed was that the Black women did not perceive marriage as their primary goal in life, nor did their parents. In fact, their parents had encouraged them to pursue college as a means for upward mobility. Their parents understood that in order for their daughters to become independent financially, they would need a “good” education. Although, they were not able to assist their daughters in realizing this goal, financially, and/or socially, education was viewed as an important goal they felt was important to achieve. In contrast, the White women were not encouraged to pursue college. Instead they had been socialized to assume work roles and marriage as their primary focus in life.

For example, one of the White students attending the community college never thought that college was an option because no one ever told her that she could attend college. Nor did she think that she had the potential to be academically successful. Further, her mother thought college was a good idea, but because she was on welfare at the time did not believe that it was the best thing for her daughter. She believed that her

daughter should spend her energies on finding a good job and a good husband. Therefore, after high school graduation, she found a good job and got married at the age of eighteen. One of the Black students who had planned on attending college after high school suffered a family crisis. In the interim, she moved out and also married after high school graduation. Some of the other Black and White female students had similar and different experiences as to why they married early.

This merging theme on early marriage was consistent with the literature reviewed. According to Hayes & Flannery, (2000), Lewis, (1993), Walker & Mehr (1992); and others, lower and working class women have been socialized within their families and educational environments to believe that schooling is not for them. From my perspective, these women, especially the White participants who were not encouraged to pursue college as a goal, were prisoners of gender. They had been governed by the expectations of the social world that surrounded them, and they fulfilled those expectations of work and marriage. Further, the Black women who tried college and failed because of their lack of preparedness married as a way out of their present circumstances. In this regard, they too, succumbed to the dominant patriarchal paradigm that women are financially and emotionally dependent on men for their survival. However, marriage was viewed only as a secondary option. Their primary choice has always been to attend college in order to become independent.

Mothering

The centrality of the mother figure was an emerging theme that showed how the impact of the relationship these Black and White students had with their mothers made a negative and/or positive impact on their high school as well as their current school status.

Some of these women felt ambivalent about their feelings and perceptions of their mothers. They believed that they suffered negative consequences because of the lack of involvement of their mothers. If their mothers would have provided them with more attention and guidance they could have been able to achieve more. There were several instances, for example, where a negative experience with the mother resulted in the daughters moving out of the home. One Black student moved out and got married right after high school because of a serious problem with her mother. Another Black student had a family issue with her mother and she moved out at the age of sixteen, dropped out of high school to work and provide for herself. One White student had this to say, "I did not have any guidance at home, my father was King, and my mother cried all of the time." In this regard, her mother was not emotionally available to give her the "mothering" she needed to act as a buffer between home and school. From her perspective, the isolation from school and home made a big impact on her lack of preparedness and emotional stability both in high school and for college.

There were two other White nontraditional female students who experienced differences with their mothers and/or family and one dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade and joined the army and got married. While the other student joined the army after she graduated from high school and that put her mother and father in a rage because they felt she was too "small" to be in the service. Each of these women joined the military service and married as a way out of their present circumstances. Many of these lower and working class women understand today that their mothers did the best that they could and because of their lack of education were not able to assist their daughters.

Tersely, those who experienced positive support and encouragement from their mothers fared better in high school than those who did not. These women did not experience any extreme suffering because their mothers were the buffers between any negative experiences they may have experienced. Many of the women in this study felt that if they had positive involvement from their mothers, their educational experience would have been different.

Furthermore, the findings also showed that the lack of a father figure had a negative impact on the high school experiences of these nontraditional Black and White undergraduate women. Several of the White women discussed the fact that their fathers were alcoholics and left the “raising” to their mothers. In other words, their fathers were not actively involved in their socialization, nor did they make a positive impact on their coming into adulthood. One of these women discussed the fact that her mother let her do her “own” thing. So not only was her father absent; in varying degrees neither was her mother available to provide her with the “mothering” she needed to develop into womanhood. From her perspective, “My mother left me alone, there was no one to tell me what to do or get your homework done.” Another Black female made the statement that her father left when she went into middle school, and she became promiscuous and was looking for love in all the wrong places. She ended up getting pregnant and getting also got married after high school.

These findings also showed that the centrality of the mother figure played a crucial role in how the women felt about themselves. For example, one Black student had this to say, “I did not let any of the negativity in high school impact me because I had my mother’s support and she made me feel worthwhile and special, like I could do

anything.” This particular student was received an academic scholarship to attend college. Further, she was one of the Black women who had a strong sense of self, which assisted her positively throughout her high school and college experiences. Hayes & Flannery (2000) found that positive mother-daughter relations influence the women in developing a health self-identity. Further, they believe that health mother-daughter relationships are crucial for the development of a healthy self-esteem. “This type of relationship can assist girls in their education and learning, as they are empowered to the degree that they have the support and encouragement of their mothers” (p. 61). This was consistent with the women in this study who experienced positive relationship and connections to their mothers. These women experienced high school as positive and further have had more positive experiences in higher education because they received affirmations and support from their mothers. At the community college three Black and two White nontraditional women received positive “mothering” support and at the four-year private college three Black and no White women experienced “mothering” support as positive.

Nontraditional women who reported that they had conflicts between themselves and their mothers did report some positive mother daughter relationships. For the White women, many of their mothers could not understand why they wanted to attend college. For instance, one woman discussed how her mother thought that she should be paying more attention to her husband and family instead of going to college. Her parents did not approve of her attending college. Another White female stated that her mother would rather support her getting married. One of the Black women stated that she has to earn her mothers support because she has changed her career goals several times. In this

regard, her mother will believe her educational aspiration once she graduates from college. However, she believes that the mother-daughter relationship she shares with her mother is positive.

Those women, who did not have supportive mothers during their high school days, felt somewhat at a disadvantage in comparison to those students who had active participation from their parents. Several of the women also did receive any active involvement in their schooling from their fathers. Luttrell (1997) categorized the mother-daughter relationship into three distinct types; the uninvolved mothers who work full and part-time and those who lack the knowledge about the educational process; school backups are mothers who are actively involved in their child's education. They supervise homework, provide discipline, as well as attend school meetings, etc.; the antagonists, are mothers who support and speak up for their children against teachers and those who treat their children unfairly, harshly, or abusively.

The majority of the women in this study were from lower-working class families, and categorized their mothers in the uninvolved group. For the most part, their mothers worked full and/or part-time. Many of their mothers and fathers were not high school graduates, and even those who were left the schooling of their daughters with the teachers and other school officials. Because of this lack of involvement, their daughters did not receive the support and guidance they needed from their school. Further, these women believed that if their mothers and fathers would have taken an active role in their education, they believe that they would have experienced high school differently. However, these women did not condemn their parents as they understood their families' financial situations, and their lack of knowledge about the educational process. Their

mothers did, however, in various degrees take on the role of school back-ups because they made sure that their daughters had food and clothing, and that they did their homework. Even if they did not understand the homework assignment, for the most part their parents valued education and understood the importance of their children completing their homework. None of the women in this study discussed whether or not their mothers or fathers took on the role of antagonist and defended them against school personnel.

All of the women in this study both Black and White who are themselves mothers discussed in detail their feelings about their roles as wives and mothers. They discussed the difficulties they have with combining their roles as mothers and wives. The majority of these women have support from their spouses, parents and siblings. Because of the positive support they have, many of them do not experience any type of situational barriers. Yet, they still experience guilt feelings by not always being available to their families.

The situational barriers for the 20--ten Black and ten White-- students were consistent with the literature--they struggled with issues of childcare, their changing roles as wives and mothers, and their concerns about resources to pay for college. The findings showed that many of the women--nine Black and eight White-- expressed having to balance spending time with their children and their activities, balancing their employment responsibilities with attending school. These findings were consistent with Luttrell (1991), Merriam and Caffarell (1991), Compling (1989), Lewis (1988), and Austin (1976), who found in their respective studies that many nontraditional female students experience time as a situational barrier as they work to balance home, work, and

school responsibilities. The findings further revealed that the women who received positive family support, appeared not to struggle nor was their academic success impacted in a negative manner by the pressure of these situational barriers. This, too, was consistent with the literature which pointed out that those adult students who received positive support from family members do not have to concern themselves with child care and/or time to study. Further, the support and encouragement from family members enhanced the self-esteem of students.

For those women who are married many of them have experienced positive support from their spouses, children, parents and siblings. From my perspective and experiences as a wife, mother, student and employee, my family believed that if I was happy they were happy. In which, they supported me 100% in my pursuit for higher education. Therefore, reflecting on the women's stories, those who had positive support believed that their families were concerned about them accomplishing their own personal goals. This type of positive support was consisted with nine of the Black nontraditional women and two of the White women.

Although the majority of these students experienced positive family support, which helped in eliminating or reducing their situational barriers, there were some women who had no (or limited) family support. Lewis (1988), in her study on nontraditional female students, reported that while some women receive positive encouragement and support, some women receive passive nonsupport, resistance and even hostility for their desires to achieve their educational aspiration. The findings showed that this was the case for three (two White and one Black-single parent) students received limited or no support from their spouses or children.

This hostility and lack of support in part is due to the fear of changing gender roles. Some husbands feel threatened and disapprove of the educational endeavors of their wives. Smith (1993) in her study identifies three aspects of support that could have been provided by husbands whose wives returned to education. First, there is practical support, in which husband's assume and share some of the domestic duties of the household. Including, but not limited to childcare, and other duties that would allow the female student time to study and attend classes. Second, financial support, in which husbands share and assist in financing the educational endeavors of their wives. Lastly, emotional support, in which husband's is supportive and encouraging of their wives' pursuit of higher educational goals.

The majority of the women in this study experienced support from their spouses and children, as it related to practical, financial and emotional support. All of the Black women who are married in this study received full support from their spouses. Many voiced that they could not focus on their studies or be successful had it not been for their husband's taking up the slack and encouraging them to move forward in their education.

However, there were some women, who received varying forms of support, and/or lack of support. For example, there was two White females who stated that their husbands went back and forth with their support. In other words, their support was not consistent. One husband could not understand why she had quit her \$60,000+ position to attend college. Yet, her college-aged children supported her educational aspirations 100%. The other woman also discussed the fact that her husband went back and forth with his support. In that he was proud of her academic accomplishments, but fearful of her growth and development. She was not the woman he had married 16 years ago.

From her perspective, that was a good thing, as it will keep him on his toes, pay more attention to her and not take her for granted. Her daughter did not support her decision to attend college because her life had changed and she was not happy with not having her mother readily available. However, both women discussed how the inconsistency in the support they received from their spouses did have some negative affect on their overall success. But, they also expressed that they are determined not to let this inconsistency hinder them from achieving their ultimate goal of a college education, as well as their own personal growth and development.

There were two other White women who received no support from their spouses. Their husbands were not at all happy with their change in lifestyle. One of these women had a small child and her husband in no way provided any type of practical support. He did however reluctantly provided some financial support, as she is employed full-time in the family business. While the other woman received no financial support from her husband, however, she did receive a scholarship from her church and employer. Both of these women received emotional support from their children. Yet, neither of them received any type of emotional support and/or encouragement from their spouses. They felt that they were doing things their way and for themselves. The findings also showed that the Black student, who is a single parent, experienced limited support from her mother and siblings. For example, there were many occasions where she had to bring her daughter to class, as well as to her third shift job. This experienced provided many frustrations for her, yet, she was not willing to let the negativity hinder or stop her from pursuing her educational goals. "I did what I had to do and most of the time it was not easy."

Also, the findings showed that the two White students who received no support from their spouses; believed their spouses were not at all happy with their decision to return to higher education. This, too, was consistent with the literature reviewed. The studies of Luttrell (1997), Merriam and Caffarell (1991), Compling (1989), Lewis, (1988), and Astin (1976), and others, showed that husband and wife relationships can become strained when women return to educational institutions. Husbands can become threatened by the growth and development of their wives because their wives are no longer the women they married. Women who are experiencing growth and development emerge into more independent persons. Identity-line tension, the point of discomfort where new definitions of gender roles threaten other aspects of an individual's life, is not uncommon when conflicts occur as a result of a female's return to an educational setting (Yogev, 1983). Numerous studies have showed that the attitude of the husband towards a woman's return to college can be a crucial indicator of her educational success and satisfaction. Although these three students received no or limited support from family members, their lack of support did not deter them from attending college or from doing it successful. From their perspectives, the constant stress and strain further assured them of the importance of doing something for themselves. They were accomplishing a goal that was important for their self-esteem and their sense of self-worth. The literature also suggests that the positive support of significant other--spouses, children, parents and other relatives, friends, etc.-- may be more important for returning adult women than traditional college women. Because of the many challenges facing returning adult women, positive family support and encouragement can counterbalance some of the negative pressures they may receive from the institution of higher education they attend.

Motivational Factors Which Influenced Nontraditional Women to Return to Higher Education

The findings of the motivational factors regarding adult women participation in post secondary learning activities were consistent with the literature reviewed. For many women, their roles and responsibilities in the family have changed, and they have more of a need to enrich themselves personally and intellectually. The twenty Black and White students in this study, regardless of institutional context returned to college for a variety of reasons, and the findings further showed that these twenty students reported similar reasons for attending college. The women in this current study appeared to parallel the studies conducted by Clayton and Smith (1987), Lewis (1988), Leonard (1994), Luttrell (1997), and others. They found multiple reasons why returning women participate in learning activities. They found that returning women are interested in becoming financially self-supporting, expanding their "horizon," growing and developing personally, raising their self-esteem, preparing for employment, and enhancing their promotional opportunities to better understand and learn about life and the world and to do something for themselves, and above all, to take pride in their accomplishments of completing their goals. These were all similar motivational factors that were discussed by other feminist writers on why adult women participate in educational programs.

Further, Clayton and Smith (1987) found that women were also motivated to participate in learning programs to make others proud, to become role models, to share their knowledge for the benefit of others, and to meet new people, as well as for humanitarian and civic reasons. This current study showed that of the twenty female students, only five--three Black and two White--listed the need to help others as one of

their motivational factors. Some of these women were motivated by the sheer purpose of proving to others that they can be “somebody,” and that they are capable of being academically successful and able to make something meaningful out of their lives.

Leonard (1994) categorizes the findings on why the women in her study returned to educational programs into two categories--instrumental motivation and personal motivation. Finding was supported by the voices of the nontraditional female students in this study. About half of the students in this study could be categorized in the instrumental motivational category, as they were motivated to attend college for instrumental reasons such as the desire to change careers and the need to enhance their opportunities in their present positions. The other half of the students in this study could be categorized in the personal motivational category. They were motivated to pursue their college degrees for personal reasons--to enhance their self-confidence and self-esteem because they wanted to finish something they thought they could not do. Also, they were motivated to fulfill a private challenge--to prove to themselves and others that they can be academically successful (Leonard 1994).

Some of the classical studies on why adults participate in learning activities were also consistent with the findings on the 20 Black and White students in this present research study. In Houle's (1961) study, two types of goal-oriented learners were identified. The first type of learners are those who are self-motivated by their personal desires for job advancement or personal improvement. This type of learner pursues goals because it is required by someone else; for example, an employer suggested training or some type of learning to enhance their job skills. Morstain and Smarts' (1974) presents multiple reasons why adults are motivated to participate in learning. Of these factors, the

women in this study clustered around Factor III Social Welfare. For example, four of these students were most interested in helping others by using their lives to make a difference in the lives of others. The majority of the twenty Black and White students clustered around Factor IV, Professional Advancement, as they were interested in advancing their career opportunities and advancing professionally to make a difference in the lives of their families. There were only two students who fit Factor V Escape/Stimulation. One Black female was retired, and a White female student was planning to retire after being with the telephone company for over thirty years. The last motivational factor, Factor VI Cognitive Interest, was a factor that fit most of the women in this study, as each of them were interested in learning for the sake of learning in their own way, because it is now their time.

Carp, Peterson and Roelfs (1974) also identified multiple reasons why adults participate in learning. These reasons are as follows: (1) Knowledge Goals--to become better informed, satisfy curiosity; (2) Personal Goals--get new job, advance in present job, get certificate or license, attain degree; (3) Community goals--understand community problems, become better citizen, work for solutions to problems, (4) Religious Goals--serve church, further spiritual well-being; (5) Social Goals--meet new people, feel sense of belonging, (6) Escape Goals--get away from routine, get away from personal problems; (7) Obligation Fulfillment---meet educational standards; (8) Personal Fulfillment---be a better parent, spouse, become a happier person; and (9) Cultural Knowledge--study one's culture. These two classical studies on motivational factors for why adult female students participate in learning activities are supportive of each other and the findings on Black and White female nontraditional students in this study.

There were diverse reasons why these ten Black and ten White women decided to participate in higher education. Many of these women reported reasons that were consistent with each other. Regardless if they attended a community college or a four-year private college, and regardless if they were Black or White, ages twenty-six or fifty-three, their reasons were similar. Some of their reasons were to fulfill their personal goals, to add financial stability to their families, to do something for themselves, to prove to others and themselves that they were capable and worthy, and/or to make a difference in their communities. Therefore, the Black and White students in this study were consistent with the studies mentioned above and validate the earlier studies on why adult women participate in learning programs. In essence, regardless of the type of institution, race, social class, and/or age, the nontraditional female students in this current study are motivated to participate in learning programs to accomplish goals for themselves. "It is my turn/time to do things my way."

As I reviewed these motivational factors, I found that my reasons were also in line with those of the studies listed above and with the women in this current study. I wanted to show those, who said that I did not have the academic potential because of my race, social and gender status that they were wrong. Further, I wanted to prove to them and myself that I was capable of learning and becoming "somebody." The findings revealed what I anticipated. That is, women, regardless of race or social class, are motivated by similar reasons to return to college.

Academic Anxieties Experienced by Nontraditional Women

Studies have shown (Luttrell, 1997; Merriam & Caffarell, 1991; *Taking Liberties Collections*, 1989; Lewis, 1988; Cross, 1979, 1981; Carp, Peterson and Roelfs, 1974, and others) that many women do not participate in learning activities. They believe that they are too old to learn or that their poor earlier educational background did not adequately prepare them for academic success. The experiences of the twenty nontraditional Black and White women in this study voiced similar reasons concerning their fears of returning to college. They were not consistent with the reported nonparticipation. These women, despite their dispositional barriers, or their self-perception about their abilities to learn, did not let their apprehensions hinder their active participation within the academy.

Luttrell (1997), Merriam and Caffarell (1991), Lewis (1988), Glass and Rose (1987), White (1983), and others, revealed in their studies that nontraditional women felt a sense of doubt about their academic abilities in comparison to traditional aged students. The women experienced feelings of inadequacy and the strain of being away from reading textbooks, doing assignments, and taking examinations. Further, they experienced low self-esteem in reference to their academic abilities. The findings showed that these inadequacies or dispositional barriers were consistent with the literature. Further, the majority of the women in this study were, indeed, fearful, and concerned about attending college with their younger, traditional college counterparts. Regardless of their fears and feelings of self-doubt, they were all able to move forward in their desires to complete what many of them had started earlier. They wanted to prove to themselves and to others that they were capable of being successful students with the abilities to earn college degrees.

There were three (two Blacks and one White) students who were not consistent with the literature. All of these women were very confident in their academic abilities and were not in anyway intimidated by the younger, traditional aged students. For example, one of the Black women graduated from high school with honors and was secure with these accomplishments and had no doubts about her academic abilities. The other Black student believed that she had received a quality education from the community college she attended before transferring to the private four-year college. The White student also felt comfortable with her academic abilities; she was tested by one institution, and the results showed that she was somewhat exceptional. She, too, did not feel intimidated by younger college students.

The majority of the twenty Black and White women were concerned about their abilities to be successful college students. Some of them felt a sense of insecurity when they found themselves in day classes with traditional college students. Also, many of the female students attending the community college seldom, if ever, had a class with other adult women and/or men. From their perspective, a support group for nontraditional students could have connected them with other adults who were also concerned about their abilities as adult students. This was a constant concern for the majority of the women in this study, both Black and White. Copland (1988) found that those returning women whose higher educational institutions who developed support groups, felt less alone upon their return to college. These support groups assisted the women in study skills, learning strategies, time management, coping skills, general information about college or university, orientation as to what to expect as an adult college student, and acquainted adult women with other peers so that they could assist each other.

Pedagogy vs. Andragogy

A review of the literature suggested that institutional barriers impact the experiences of nontraditional women and their abilities to experience success in a holistic manner. Thus, the learning environments can be a significant barrier to adult women as they may view college as a place designed for others. The literature was consistent with the experiences of the nontraditional women in this study. According to Maher and Tereault (1994):

Until recently, the content and pedagogy of American education, although projecting the 'illusion' that it spoke to everyone, ignored the needs and experiences, and perspectives of the majority of people in this country--women of all backgrounds, people of color, and all women and men who perceive their education as not made for them. (p. 1)

The majority of the students in this study believed that a traditional pedagogy was, in a sense, an institutional barrier, as it did not allow them the opportunity to use their experiences as a bridge to real learning and understanding of the subject under review. Further, from their perspectives, a traditional, lecture format robbed them of the education they had envisioned for themselves—an education that would transform them from their present “mindset” and would broaden their “horizons.” In other words, it would provide them with a better understanding of their social world and of themselves as women and their places within society.

The Black and White students described a variety of classroom experiences. Their experiences were on a continuum from very positive to very negative classroom environments. The results showed that there were nine--four Black and five White--students who described their classroom experiences as being either “very positive” or

“positive.” The findings showed that they had professors for one semester that respected, expected and encouraged them to speak experientially, and in that regard, they had a beneficial semester. It seems that these four women experienced having certain female professors and professors of color, who utilized a more feminist (andragogy) classroom structure that made a marked difference in the learning environment for most of these women. The professors allowed the student to be self-directed and to take some responsibility for their own learning outcomes. They were allowed to use their experiential knowledge as a bridge to learning and an understanding of the material. From their perspectives, they learned more than they had anticipated as they were allowed to grow and transform themselves into individuals with a wider perspective of what true education can be and how it can move beyond mere memorization to actualization. A White student who appreciated her Black female sociology professor illustrates this. She said:

I appreciated those classes because we were allowed to actively be a part of the teaching/learning process. We were able to learn new truth and dispel some of the stereotypes that has plagued society; the instructor was not afraid to allow the students to control the discussion and to take it where we wanted it to go. For me, that allowed for real learning, not memorizing.

The findings revealed similar sentiments from those other nontraditional female students who preferred a more open, facilitatory classroom environment.

Further, there were nine students--three Blacks and six Whites-- who experienced classroom settings that were both positive and negative. This was due to the fact that there were some instructors who respected, encouraged, and expected students to speak experientially, while other professors did not. There were three Black and three White students who reported that their positive experiences were due to the fact that they had

female professors who were very open, encouraging, and who made education fun, and at the same time, they learned more than they had anticipated. Often times the gender of the faculty member can make a difference in the direction or focus the classroom setting will take. Without actually labeling it a feminist pedagogy, which is not gender specific, a large number of female instructors stress a more cooperative, instead of a competitive, classroom and engage students in an active teaching/learning environment (Gmelch, 1998). Also, the results showed that some students experienced differences within their classroom settings. There was nine Black and six White students who experienced classroom settings that represented a more traditional setting where the instructor controlled the structure of the class, and it was more lecture focused with minimum student participation. These students revealed that since they have returned to higher education, they have had limited experience in alternative classroom settings, and those are the classes they appreciate when they have the privilege of active involvement. There were also four students--one Black and three White--who experienced classroom settings where the professors used a combination of lecture and active class participation and where students are encouraged to use their own experiences.

Secondly, the findings showed that the majority of the Black and White students--nine Blacks and six Whites--in this study were consistent with the literature as it related to andragogy and "women's ways of knowing," feminist classroom (See Chapter II – Literature Review). They identified facilitation as the best educational practice for learning, transformation, liberation, and growth and development. There was one Black student who reported that she prefers straight lecture because most instructors prefer a structured format. However, if she had a choice, she would prefer a more experiential

format. In that regard, I included her among the nine Black students who preferred participatory classroom environment. Also, there was one Black and three White students who believe that it depends on the class and/or subject matter as to which teaching/learning environment they prefer. However, the findings showed that two of these White students' preferences lean more towards straight lecture, as they want to know "everything the professor knows, and they want the professor to do that in sixteen weeks." There was only one White student who strictly prefers a traditional classroom setting.

These women were more consistent with the literature than different. That is, they believed that they learn best within an interactive learning environment where their voices (experiences) are respected. They are interested and value education and learning, and they believe that an alternative classroom format would allow them to do more than memorize for examinations. Malcolm Knowles (1970, 1970, 1984), based this theory on five assumptions that are characteristics of adult learners (refer to Chapter II Literature Review). The findings showed that, the women in this study were consistent with Knowles' theory of andragogy. These Black and White students are self-directed learners with a willingness to have their life experiences become a catalyst for learning, understanding, transformation, growth and development. Also, their narratives support a contention that these students valued a teaching/learning environment that allowed them to be somewhat self-directed and where they were able to move beyond memorization to what they termed "real" learning."

According to Maher and Tetreault (1994), hooks (1994), and Freire (1970), it is important to have an educational environment that has transforming and liberatory as its

central aim, especially for those students who are members of underrepresented groups. It is important for them to have an opportunity “to gain an education that would be relevant to their concerns, to create their own meanings, and to find their own voices in relation to the material” (Maher & Tetreault, 1994, pg. 9). Further, hooks believes that an “engaged pedagogy” would empower students, both males and females, to be actively involved in the process of self-actualization where they can transgress from an old paradigm to newly constructed common culture. The female students in this study indicated repeatedly that they value an education that would allow them to actually learn, better understand themselves, and the world in which they live. They want to take away from their learning environments something more than a stack of recorded and written notes. hooks, Blue, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, Collins, King, Lewis, Maher, Tetreault, and other feminist educators, believe that it is important for women to use their own standpoint or to be able to include their experiences in the learning process. In this regard, these students valued classroom environments that allowed them the opportunity to actively engage in the teaching/learning process.

hooks, Maher and Tetreault and others also refer to this type of educational environment as “feminist classrooms,” where both women and men are engaged in a learning community with professors to “fashion their voices rather than find them” (Maher and Tetreault, 1994, pg. 18). An environment of this nature allows women, as well as men, to use dialogue to shape and/or reshape their emerging selves. Tarule (1997), one of the authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing*, views this type of learning as constructed not only in the individual minds of women, but through the interactions of communities of knowers--a learning community that would allow both students and

professors to engage in a dichotomous relationship that can be liberatory for all participants.

The students in this study who valued this type of teaching/learning environments were most interested in engaging in this type of relationship with their professors. They believed that an open and engaging classroom environment would provide them with the optimal opportunity to learn. From their perspectives, education is much more than just preparing for their future lives; it is a process of living and making a difference in their social world.

The interactive dialogue I had with fifteen of the twenty nontraditional female students was consistent with hooks's teaching philosophy, "teaching to transgress." hooks, a proponent of the work of Paulo Freire and Tich Nhat Hanh, believes that education should engage learners. The teaching/learning environment should be one where "students and professors regard one another as "whole" humans, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world" (hooks, 1994, p. 14-15). The women in this category all preferred classroom environments that was more dialogical than lecture. It was when they had the opportunity to engage in open classroom dialogue and discussion that they perceived that real learning occurred. It was in those environments that their intellect and spirits were nurtured. This is the type of educational environment that they had been longing for--one that would validate their humanity and not oppress their self-worth. Many voiced that this type of openness in learning was not the norm but it was one that they cherished when the opportunity presented itself. Further, an open teaching/learning environment fosters learning that is actually fun.

Voice

According to Shulamit Reinharz (1994) women have historically been denied the right to speak and/or voice their experiences for fear of not being taken seriously. However, the efforts that women are taking to reclaim their voices are an act of resistance and/or rebellion to patriarchy. The majority of the women in this study prefer teaching/learning environments, which allows them an opportunity to actively participate. They prefer an environment where they can use their own voices to articulate their experiences as a platform to understanding text and subject content. This ideology is in tune with the feminist standpoint of giving voice, developing a voice, and reclaiming a voice. According to feminist educators (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Mullins, 1997, Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1997, 1996, 1986; Luke, 1996; Taylor & Marienau, 1995; Deats & Lenker, 1994; hooks, 1994; Jackson & Caffarella, 1994; Lewis, 1993; and others) when women are given the opportunity to use their own voices to name their own experiences is referred to as “giving” voice which were once unarticulated. This form of giving voice helps women to establish who they are because their voices and experiences had been unspoken and viewed as unacceptable. This concept of giving voice was consistent among the women in this study.

Many of these women were from poor and working class backgrounds and their voices were not realized during their secondary school experiences. They were interested in classroom environments that would allow them to share and to voice their unspoken experiences as a way to give meaning to themselves and their lives. For example, Natasha, one of the Black participants attending the community college stated that when she is allowed to share her experiences as a bridge to learning. She feels that she has not

gone through her devastating experiences for nothing, because she wants others to understand that one can survive and use that survival as a form of learning and growing.

There were some women in this study who were consistent with the concept of “developing” voice. One develops as voice as they begin to evolve and their voice gradual unfolds as it takes on new forms of development. In this regard women began to learn how to express their identities as they change and develop overtime. With that development women can find a voice, which feminist refers to as “an act of discovery.” For example, one of the White female students, Samantha expressed that she was always quiet because she did not want to stand out. She had learned to repress her voice in class for fear of continually being compared to her brothers. This followed her into the halls of higher education, until she took a sociology class where she begins to find her voice for the first time. “It was not as scary as I thought, the professor, she made everyone feel comfortable and no one laughed at me when I spoke.” This was a form of liberation for Samantha, because she also could not share true feelings with her parents. Therefore, her ability to develop a voice in her classroom made it less frightening to share her feelings with her parents and siblings.

The last concept of voice is referred to as “reclaiming” a voice, in this context women have lost or denied their voices because of the oppressive nature of their social and cultural expectations. In adolescence girls lose “trust in the authority of their own experiences” (Rogers, 1993, p. 273). This loss of trust and of voice as expressed by Rogers (1993) happens differently for girls of different racial, class, and cultural backgrounds. Many of the Black and White women in this study experienced a reclaiming of their voices because they had been oppressed by their race, class and/or

gender location. The Black and White women from poor and working class backgrounds were not viewed in the same light as those from middle and upper class backgrounds. For example, the White women in this study expressed how their social class backgrounds hindered them from reaching their full academic potential. They were overlooked in their classrooms and some were compared to their male siblings as not being as smart. Some of the Black women were “tracked” or socially placed in less challenging academic programs and passed on for being nice. Thus, their true voices were oppressed and were not able to be heard and/or realized. The findings showed that thirteen of these Black and White women bought into the social and cultural expectations of women to find good jobs and husbands. Therefore, andragogy instead of pedagogy was their preferred teaching/learning process. Andragogy, or an engaged pedagogy gave them the opportunity to “reclaim” their voices as they were able to transform, transgress, and liberate themselves from the oppressive environments they had experienced during their secondary education. Therefore, the feminist concept of “voice” was very consistent in the present study as it related to andragogy, or engaged pedagogy as the preferred teaching/learning practice.

The proponents of andragogy, feminist pedagogy, and facilitation believe that when students convey and contribute their ideas, it can evolve into knowledge. It can make the learning process a collective enterprise that can be transformative for both students and professors/instructors. An appropriate end to this section is the following quote from hooks’ (1994) *Teaching To Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*:

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In

that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207)

This, indeed, was the kind of education that the majority of the Black and White students in this dissertation study were longing for. An education that would allow them to voice their own experiences and to transgress beyond the boundaries of the constraints and oppression they each had experienced within their earlier schooling.

Silencing/Invisibility

The findings showed that of the twenty students, three Black and four White women perceived that they were not silenced in anyway by their institutions. In fact, they felt favored because of their status as nontraditional female students. For example, they believed that professors appreciated having nontraditional female students in their classes because of their commitment to learning and their seriousness as students. However, a majority of the students perceived that they were silenced due to their race, gender, and/or age. The responses of the women in this study were consistent with the literature. The women felt that their needs were not being met, and, further, they felt marginalized, alienated, isolated, invisible and separated. In other words, they were on the periphery of their college experiences in comparison to their traditional female counterparts.

Lewis (1993) believed that traditionally women's silence and invisibility in relation to the strategies of pedagogical practice has focused on making space for women, not necessary on encouraging women to speak and find meaning in the curriculum. Audre Lorde writes:

My silence has not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.... In the case of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear-fear of contempt, fear of censure, of some judgment, of recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all I think, we fear for the very visibility without which we cannot live (pp. 20-21).

This idea of silence as articulated by Lorde was consistent with the voices of many of the women in this study. Many of them feared the challenge of speaking out, because when they did they were shunned and not taken seriously by their White traditional peers and often times their White professors. Many of these Black women discussed this fear of visibility. For example, one Black female stated that she had to feel her way within the classroom, to make sure that her voice and her presence was accepted. In other words, these Black women had a fear of being seen, but needing to be seen and taken seriously. They had a need for their voices to be understood, and respected. Often times, they were not viewed as reliable and valid, and for this reason their needs of being seen and heard was overshadowed by their fear and silence.

According to Hayes & Flannery (2000), women have used silence as a means of self-protection. This is a way of avoiding threats to their self-esteem if their voices are viewed as unacceptable and/or not the right voice. Further, they found that girls and women learned to silence themselves in order to provide that self-protection. This too was a constant theme in the present study, as some of the Black women silenced themselves for self-protection from the sighs and moans of their White traditional counterparts. Ultimately, the public silence that girls and women experience affects their internal voices, becoming what Rogers (1993) describes as “psychological resistance-the disconnection of one’s own experience from consciousness” (p. 289). Poor and working class girls and women of various racial and cultural groups have experienced

disconnection from their emotions, voices, and selves. This rang true for some of the Black women in this study as they deliberately chose silence when their voices were not accepted as the right voice. Some learned to suppress their emotions out of a desire to appear strong and self-sufficient. Silence, invisibility, and self-isolation became strategies that many girls and women used to protect themselves from becoming objects of hurtful gossip among their peers.

Age and Gender as a Cause of Silencing

The findings showed that there were six White students who believed that their age and/or gender was the cause of their silencing by the institution. For example, one student was very disappointed, as she perceived that her academic achievements were not acknowledged by the campus celebration. She said that:

I have been on the Dean's List consistently, and there was a large celebration... and here's a big sign "Welcoming Parents"...It is insensitive, and it also sends a message that traditional students have the right to celebrate this, and I actually feel kind of discounted in that

This particular student felt that her status as a nontraditional student was a form of silencing, as her academic achievements were marginalized by the same celebration that was supposed to give her pride in her accomplishments. In essence, she felt invisible, not recognized, not seen because of her nontraditional student status. Some of the other White students also believed that they were silenced because of their adult status. The institution had not been sensitive in the scheduling of classes, the hours of counseling, bookstore hours, etc. Further, they felt penalized because of their status as nontraditional female students.

There were other nontraditional women both Black and White who believe that their nontraditional status put them in a position of silence. For example, a White female student believed that her age, as well as her gender location was problematic. A male counselor expressed to her that as a mature woman she would not have the opportunity to make back the money she was spending on college education. From, her perspective, this not only disrespectful but was a form of silencing her ambitions to achieve a college education, as well as to enhance her own personal growth and development. This made her angry and she confronted her silence as she articulated in the telling of her story, and how that experience made her feel as a woman, and a student. "Translating experience into metaphor has enable me to render visible the visible" (Bersianki, 1986, p. 48). From my perspective, this telling and recounting of her story allowed her to create a safety net against nonexistence.

The literature reviewed did not speak specifically to the issue of silencing in reference to nontraditional student status. However, the concept of positionality could be interpreted to include nontraditional females. Their positions as nontraditional female students could silence them and place them on the outside of those female students who are of traditional age. According to Laurie Finke (1992):

What we need is a description that is not based on categories but...on positionality, on relations...No group is in and of itself oppressed or marginal. It's only in relation to something else. So that, for instance, we can say women are marginal compared to men (*nontraditional female students in relations to traditional female students*). ... What is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies. (As quoted in Maher, and Tetreault, 1994, p. 164)

The positions of the White nontraditional female students had a negative impact on how they perceived that they were being silenced by the institution. Their marginal positions

as nontraditional students placed them in an oppressive position in comparison to the traditional college students. Their accomplishments, from their perspective were trivialized and not seen in equal light to those of traditional college students.

Race as a Cause Of Silencing

The findings showed that six Black students reported that their race was problematic as it relates to their feelings of being silenced. Further, eight Black students expressed that race has always been an issue surrounding their identity as Black females. Often times, within their educational environments, race impacted their sense of self-worth. Their experiences were consistent with the literature. Apple (1993) discusses how the life histories of real people are affected by their collective history as it relates to the experiences of people of color, inside and outside of educational institutions. Thus, race became a constant as these eight Black women reflected on their past and present experiences within the academy. Further, the findings showed that each of these Black students understood that to be Black meant being perceived as less than those of the dominant culture.

Some of these Black students could not handle the pressure of being assertive with respect to their racial status; therefore, they made a conscious decision to silence themselves within their learning environments. They perceived that it was no longer safe for them to actively participate and decided to “go along to get along” in their educational environments, not to make “waves” but to just go with the “flow” and get their grades. I believe that because some (two) of these Black students had a stronger sense of self-worth in their positions as Black women, they refused to be silenced. In fact, several of

the women in this minority position retorted that no one could silence them even if they tried. Therefore, those who could not safely navigate through the difficult classroom climates appeared to exhibit more wounds and developed what Steele (1990) refers to as an “anti-self.”

The condition of being Black in America means that one will likely endure more wounds to one’s self-esteem than others and that the capacity for self-doubt born of these wounds will be compounded and expanded by the Black race’s reputation of inferiority. The anti-self will most likely have more ammunition with which to deflate the believing self and its aspirations ...thus draw it down into inertia, passivity, and faithlessness. And the universal human struggle to have belief win over doubt will be more difficult... (p. 41-42).

It appears that four of the six Black students had developed this “anti-self.” They decided to remain silent and not draw attention to themselves “to get the good grade” and just “get out.” There was one Black student who did not choose silence. She tried to feel the class out first to see if she was going to be accepted before she spoke. Also, she revealed that when the topic centers on issues of poverty and race, she could choose to remain silent to appear not to be a “whiner.” Therefore, in varying forms, several Black students bought into the concept of the “anti-self.”

There were six Black students who perceived that they faced an inhospitable campus climate that further silenced them within their institutions. The findings showed that those Black female students who felt silenced and who attended the four-year private college were surprised that a religious college could be so “chilly,” “hostile,” and “unfriendly.” These women often experienced “double-jeopardy”--negative attitudes based on their race as well as their gender. Aparico’s (1999) study on women faculty of color seemed to parallel the experiences of these nontraditional Black female students. They faced double forms of isolation based on their race and gender and the devaluation

of their skills and abilities. Each made conscious decisions not to allow the “chilly” climate to pierce their “spirits” and affect their academic success. Four of these Black students were somewhat intimidated by the “chilly” and often “unfriendly” environment and chose to be silent, but also chose the route to “go along to get along” and not make waves. Regardless of how hostile the campus climate would get, all six Black students expressed that they came to their respective institutions to earn a degree, and they were not willing to let anything deter them from accomplishing that goal, even if it meant doing it in silence. Their willingness to not let the environment hinder their success was consistent with Denton (1990), who states that in order to obtain success in a hostile “chilly” environment, students of color are required to develop special skills in coping and adapting. The findings showed that all of these Black women relied on their spiritual strength to cope and adapt to whatever situations they were faced with.

Further, the findings showed that these Black women felt further silenced when they were asked to be the “voice” for all Black people and Black women of their race, in particular. Whenever the class discussion was related to a topic on “minority” issues of any kind, all eyes would systematically turn towards the lone Black person in the class. According to Comas-Diaz and Green (1994), “many do so at their own individual expense” (p. 355). In other words, when and if the women took the responsibility to speak, they also took the risk of being alienated or ridiculed for their views. At times, the women of color can make themselves targets of scapegoating, if what they have to say makes those from the dominant culture uncomfortable. This was consistent with many of the Black students, and one of the reasons that some of them decided to no longer express their views in the classroom was the fear of being treated with hostility. From their

narratives, the findings showed that when the women would speak, they were not viewed in a positive light. The negativity they received from White students, and at times faculty members, contributed to the decision to shut them off and remain silent. For example, one Black student made this statement as it related to her “chilly” environment and her decision to remain silent:

In three of my classes we had been dealing with race and ethnic issues. When I expressed my views, it's like you are looked down upon. There has been times when I expressed my views, and White students will walk out of the class. It is a shame that race is still so much an issue today. I had decided at that moment that I am not saying another word in those classes. I am not going to talk again. They have their perspectives, and I have ours, or at least mine. (Journey 38)

Alperson (1975), in her article, *The Minority Woman in Academe*, discussed how women of color within the academy were vulnerable to stereotyping as “radical chic” by White intellectuals and their idealized images of minorities. It was further discussed that those minorities who do not live up to the myth can lead to their being rejected. However, those who are in compliance with the image can lead to “intolerance for individual differences among minority people...the radical chic myth serves to lock minorities into yet another stereotype that is no less vicious than the stereotypes it replaces” (Alperson, 1975, p. 254). The six Black students were also consistent with the “radical chic” hypothesis, as they were locked into the negative stereotype, especially when the discussion centered on people of color (Black) and poverty. Their voices would be shunned, silenced, and they were not taken seriously. The findings showed that two Black students were very expressive as they related their experiences which paralleled the “radical chic” hypothesis. One such example is as follows:

Because I have personally experienced post-traumatic stress, I was sharing my experiences and views in my psychology class when we were discussing the psychology of prejudice. This White student verbally attacked me. He spoke to

me like I was the most stupid person on earth. I felt that he attacked me not because I didn't know anything, but that I was not supposed to know anything. Hopefully, this is making some sense to you as to what I am trying to say. I was too knowledgeable about the subject matter, and he attacked me, and the professor said nothing to validate what I had said. I thought that I would just stay quiet from now on.

Although six of the ten student's felt silenced in their educational environment, four of them did not. Of these four, one perceived that she did not feel silenced because she had two Black professors this semester and they gave her a sense of security and safety. Further, the findings showed that her female Black sociology professor became her mentor. This factor played a crucial role in her not feeling isolated, invisible, and alienated within her community college environment. The positive outcome of Black students having positive Black mentors was consistent with Blackwell (1988), as she articulated that the need for mentoring relationships for Black students and Black women, in particular, is a necessary factor in their successful navigation through the higher education process. However, the findings showed that there were three other Black students who reported that they in no way felt silenced within their educational environments. In fact, they felt favored, encouraged and supported.

The findings also showed that, due to the feelings of silence, these six Black students also viewed themselves as being invisible within their institutions. The idea of their invisibility was also consistent with the literature reviewed. Maher and Tetreault (1994) believe that Black women and other women of color feel this sense of invisibility because of their positions of Black women within the academy. Because society has positioned them as the "other," Black women have not been able to assert themselves as individuals apart from their racial group. In this regard, they are invisible and not able to be viewed as nontraditional students who are seeking knowledge and the opportunities to

make a difference in their everyday lives. For example, Opheila (37) believed that she was invisible and said that, “as a Black woman, I am invisible because no one wants to see me--I mean really see me as a person.”

Although six of these Black women experienced environments that could be characterized as “chilly,” they were able to rise above the passive hostility and navigate themselves through the maze of intolerance and hostile and unfriendly waters to focus on accomplishing their goals. Two of these students were strong and confident and did not allow the negativity to hinder them from expressing their views during class discussions. The other four learned to sit in silence to just get through and to finish what they came to the institutions to accomplish. These differences in the attitudes of these Black students leave an unanswered question: “Why were two of these women more self-confident than the other four, and yet, they each shared many background characteristics?” Did their primary socialization make an impact on their self-confidence and sense of self-worth? While one could speculate, this issue deserves more in-depth investigation.

Because the educational environments were “chilly,” over half of these Black women discussed feelings of isolation and alienation. The sense of being silenced reflected the reality of their isolation. While they knew that they could survive the loneliness, it can cause emotional turmoil for the individual and her sense of effectiveness as a college student. The findings further showed that there was a big difference in those Black students who attended a community college and those Black students attending a four-year private college. The community college appeared to be more accepting of diversity than the private four-year religious college. The private four-year private college climate was lacking in sensitivity and racial/ethnic awareness of people of color.

Therefore, the type of college and their awareness of racial diversity makes a difference in whether or not the environment is conducive for nontraditional women of color. This is another issue that warrants in-depth exploration in a future study.

Influence of Religious/Spiritual Support

The findings revealed that the majority of these students believed that their relationships with God also provided them with positive support. However, there were some important differences between the Black and White women. The Black students discussed their spirituality, their relationship with God, and how they each relied on that relationship for support and survival through their educational endeavors. In contrast, none of the White women provided such a discussion until after the question regarding their religious backgrounds was posed. Those who responded believed that their Christian faith kept them grounded and gave them focus for continuing their academic studies. For example, one woman was very passionate in her response to her spirituality:

You know spirituality has always been a part of my life. ...I'm from a home that had an alcoholic father and that's the only constant that I had in my life was church. I'm going to start crying because God has always been there for me as a kid. Giving me a reason to hope. It is God who is directing me now and opening up all of those doors of opportunity. (Alexandria 48)

The literature did not discuss White women and their attachment to religion or how their religious background was a form of support.

The responses of the Black students were consistent with the literature in reference to their spirituality and/or religious support. From their perspectives, religion was a natural support system that was an integral part of their staying focused on their aspiration for a college degree. They believed that it was God who kept them focused and helped them to survive through the difficult times when dealing with racism, sexism

and issues of social class. According to Williams (1993), Black women have a history of relying on God to help them to “make a way out of no way.” God has assisted Black women on their journey to faith and “learning to trust the righteousness of God in spite of trouble and injustice” (p. x). The faith to rise above, as one Black nontraditional woman “voiced” resisting and rising above the “junk” that is at work to destroy and subvert the creative power and energy of accomplishing desired goals. The Black women in this study, were similar to Williams (1993) as they continuously struggled to rise above the forces that could have pierced their spirits and kept them from realizing their goals. Their faith in God and their dependency on their relationship to God, allowed them to triumph over the rough and rocky road of isolation, intimidation, separation, and at times, open hostility to move forward to the realization of their educational goals.

Recommendations

The following recommendations could assist college administrators, deans, department chairs, professors, and student service advocates to better understand the experiences of nontraditional female students and, to properly assess their educational needs, which could make a positive impact on their educational success.

1. Sensitivity training for instructors/professors and students to provide more of an awareness of what is involved when interacting with racial and/or diverse populations of nontraditional female students.
2. Instructors/professors should be encouraged to incorporate alternative teaching/learning activities, which would allow nontraditional female students an opportunity to actively participate in their learning environment.

3. Community colleges and four-year colleges, both public and private should establish support groups for nontraditional women. These support groups could assist the student as well as their families in working through the many challenges that nontraditional female students face upon their return to higher education.
4. The establishment of mentoring relationships for nontraditional female students-to connect nontraditional female students with other female instructors, administrators, and staff on the campus. This type of a mentoring relationship could enhance retention of nontraditional women and provide someone with whom they could discuss their educational goals and aspirations.

Limitations of the Study

The findings may not be generalized because of the small sample of Black and White nontraditional female students. However, this study could be used as a pilot study to conduct a quantitative, larger study on a more diverse population of nontraditional female students. The limitations are as follows:

1. No literature was reviewed on social psychological issues that could have provided a theoretical framework for understanding the issues of abuse. In this regard these issues went beyond the scope and depths of this particular study.
2. More interview and focus group sessions could have allowed the women more time to elaborate on the questions that laid the framework for this study. I found that one interview session or one focus group session was

not enough. There were too many questions for them to digest all in one session.

3. Small sample; shortcomings of qualitative methods; (i.e., were the women truthful, subjectivity).

Recommendations for Future Study

After living with this research study for the last two-three years, there are many things I would do differently if I were at the beginning of this study. As a nontraditional Black female student with an associate degree and now through the Ph.D., and as a novice researcher struggling to find her way as a developing sociologist, I struggled to find my own “voice” throughout this project. I struggled as I tried to present myself in a “scholarly” manner, so that when others read this research they could see its worth. For I, too, like the Black and White female students in this study, believed that my voice could not be the right “voice.” After all, who will listen to someone with my background--a working class Black woman from meager beginnings? Most of the time I felt that I was not worthy of conducting such an undertaking. However, as I remained in the struggle, it became apparent that no one else could tell their stories and express their feelings with the passion and understanding like I could.

Future researchers who are interested in the experiences of nontraditional female students should seriously consider the following recommendations.

1. Review the literature for more studies conducted by women on women who are returning to institutions of high education to glean a better understanding of their earlier educational experiences and how those experiences impacted their experiences in higher education.

2. Study nontraditional women and issues of abuse and how that abuse affected their secondary and postsecondary experiences: How they worked through their abuse and did they seek out guidance from school officials, parents, or professional counseling?
3. Further study of why some Black women continued to speak in their authentic voices regardless of the “chilly” and sometimes “hostile” environment, and why other Black women chose to be silent.
4. Review literature that specifically addresses the similarities and differences of traditional and nontraditional female students on college campuses.
5. Conduct more than one interview session (possibly two-three) to fully understand the family backgrounds and socialization of nontraditional female students. Understand more specifically how family relationships impacted their college experiences.
6. Include a more diverse population of nontraditional women--Native American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and Lesbians.
7. Conduct a quantitative study on the experiences of nontraditional female students from a diverse population.
8. Conduct a comparative qualitative study on traditional and nontraditional female students using similar questions from this research study.
9. Conduct a study including males.
10. Conduct a study that also involves professors, administrators, etc.

Conclusions

This study examined the experiences of twenty (ten Black and ten White) nontraditional undergraduate female students attending a community college and a four-year private college, to determine if there were differences due to race, age, class, religious background, etc. The purpose was to understand what motivational factors determined their return to higher education. What barriers--situational, institutional, and dispositional-- impacted their college success? Specifically, which classroom environment--pedagogy or andragogy--was perceived as best practice for nontraditional female students?

The qualitative findings provided a rich description of the experiences of these 20 nontraditional female students. The literature and studies reviewed for this research study validated and supported the findings. Further, the findings revealed that the earlier educational experiences of these women impacted their overall education in a positive or negative way and facilitated the reasons they are nontraditional students.

The findings showed that their positive or negative high school experiences was also influenced by their family relationships, their social class, race and gender stratification. Those female students who had positive relationships with their mothers appeared to have a more positive high school and college experience. Also, the findings showed that the absence of a father figure also impacted their overall schooling experience.

With reference to pedagogy versus andragogy as a teaching/learning practice, the majority of the women in this study were consistent with the literature as it related to a more open, feminist, self-directed classroom format. From the perception of the Black

and White nontraditional women in this study, the majority of them do prefer the kind of educational praxis that is active and not passive. They preferred andragogy, or an engaged pedagogy that could lift them from their oppressive prior educational and socioeconomic beginnings to where they can transform and/or transgress into meaningful selves. hooks (1994) articulates it best:

They do want an education that is healing to the uninformed, unknowing spirit. They do want knowledge that is meaningful. They rightfully expect that my colleagues and I will not offer them information without addressing the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences. (p.19).

As I analyzed the lived experiences of these twenty nontraditional female students, this is the type of education they not only wanted, but needed in order to transgress forward. One student put it this way, "I need to broaden my horizon." Another had this to say: "...to understand where I really fit in the scheme of things." I interpret this as a movement away from the wounds and hurts of the past, as they work to overcome their issues of racism, sexism, ageism, and classism. No longer having to resort to or put themselves into "silence," fearing that their own "voices" and their social, cultural and historical backgrounds are not sufficient. These women need an educational epistemology that would assist them in developing their own voices and, to not be afraid of using their experiences as a bridge to constructing knowledge: "...how to dialogue with the text, the author, and the instructor in such a way that their beliefs can be both tested and refined" (Taylor & Marienau, 1995, p. 9). In other words, they needed an opportunity to bridge practice and theory as a way to connect knowledge that is meaningful, and at the same time, transformative.

In conclusion, the findings show that regardless of race, class, gender, and/or age, all women have similar educational experiences based on one or more of these inequalities. Many of these women experienced “double” and sometimes “triple” jeopardy as it related to their race, gender and/ or class location. My domain assumption was that my educational experiences as a Black woman socialized in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s was unique and different in comparison to Black and White women who are younger and educated in the 1980s, 1990s, and in the new millennium. However, this domain assumption was not found to be true, as my experiences were not unique. This study made me realize that many of these women, Black and White, have similar educational experiences that parallel my own. Also, I believe that Black women would still experience issues of racial isolation and alienation, as race still matters. However, I did not believe that White women of today struggled as much as Black women, and in some way, their “White Privilege” would protect them from the wounds that are often imposed on women of color. I did not believe that issues of race and/or gender would be such a salient factor today as in the past. The findings showed that both Black and White women struggle and suffer within their educational environments. They both experience alienation, isolation, equally, not one more than the other, different, yet the same.

We live in a society where there are profound differences that constantly tell us that classism, sexism and racism, are things of the past and that we need to move on. According to this ideology, affirmation is not considered necessary and it is believed that all of us have an equal chance. We no longer struggle with the “isms,” that things are really better for those individuals who work hard. On the other hand, I often wonder,

better for whom? The findings taught me that for women, regardless if they are Black or White, it is business as usual. Contrary to Patricia Hill-Collins assertion, the matrix of domination affects all women, because where we might be “privileged” in one area, we are oppressed in another. Education is power, especially when it is delivered in such a way that we can change our own paradigm, as well as assist in changing the paradigms of others. As a womanist/feminist educator, it is my responsibility to utilize a praxis that will assist all students, both males and females, to become life-long learners. It is necessary to provide an opportunity for students to use critical reflection as they work towards not only understanding the subject matter, but themselves as well and where, why, and how they fit within their society. There are many womanist/feminist scholars and educators who influenced and impacted my own epistemology. I would like to close with a quote from Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich’s (1990) text, *Transforming Knowledge*:

And finally, I believe, as I have said, that thinking reflexively is one of the grounds of human freedom, in part because it reveals to us that we are always both subject and object of our own knowing, of our culture, of our world. We are not just products, objects, of our world, nor are we just subjects existing in a void. We are free subjects whose freedom is conditioned-not determined-by a world not of our making but in many ways open to the effects of our actions. If nothing else, then, I believe in the educational importance of thinking and of critique as preparations for a kind of action that engages with others, and with the world.... (p. 189).

APPENDICES

Appendix A

CONFIDENTIAL DEMOGRAPHIC STUDENT SURVEY

CONFIDENTIAL DEMOGRAPHIC STUDENT SURVEY**PART I. Please circle your response.**

1. What is your current status?
 - A. Freshman
 - B. Sophomore
 - C. Junior
 - D. Senior
 - E. Certificate Program
 - F. Non-Degree Seeking
 - G. Other

2. What is your program affiliation?
 - A. Business
 - B. Education
 - C. Liberal Arts
 - D. Nursing
 - E. Psychology
 - F. Social Work
 - G. Sociology
 - H. Technical
 - I. Other _____

3. Are you:
 - A. Full-time student
 - B. Part-time student

4. Do you attend:
 - A. Day classes
 - B. Evening classes
 - C. Weekend classes

5. How many hours per week do you spent studying?
 - A. 0-5
 - B. 6-10
 - C. 11-15
 - D. 16-20
 - E. Other _____

6. Age Range?
 - 25-29
 - 30-34
 - 35-39
 - 40-45
 - 46-50
 - Over 50

7. Are you affiliated with any organizations on campus
A. No
B. Yes (if yes please indicate which organization (s))
8. Race?
A. White (not Hispanic origin)
B. Black (not Hispanic origin)
C. Hispanic
D. Asian/Pacific Islander
E. Native American
F. Other _____
9. Martial Status?
A. Single
B. Married
C. Divorced
D. Widow/Widower
E. Other _____
10. Are you affiliated with any form of organized religion?
A. No
B. Yes
11. Do you have children?
A. None
B. 1
C. 2
D. 3
E. 4
F. 5 or more
G. Empty Nester
12. What is your income range?
A. Under \$10,000
B. \$11,000 - \$15,000
C. \$16,000 - \$25,000
D. \$26,000 - \$35,000
E. \$36,000 - \$45,000
F. \$46,000 - \$55,000
G. \$56,000 - \$65,000
H. \$66,000 - \$75,000
I. \$76,000 +
13. What is the primary source for your tuition?
A. Self
B. Academic Scholarship
C. Financial Aid (indicate what kind)

- D. Full tuition reimbursement by employer
 - E. Partial reimbursement by employer
 - F. Other _____
14. Father's Occupation:
- A. Professional
 - B. Clerical
 - C. Managerial/Supervisory
 - D. Technical
 - E. Skilled Trades
 - F. Semi-Skilled
 - G. Unskilled
 - H. Retired (occupation before retirement) _____
15. Mother's Occupation:
- A. Professional
 - B. Clerical
 - C. Managerial/Supervisory
 - D. Technical
 - E. Skilled Trades
 - F. Semi-Skilled
 - G. Unskilled
 - H. Retired (occupation before retirement) _____
16. Fathers Education:
- A. Less than High School
 - B. High School Diploma
 - C. Some College
 - D. Trade School
 - E. Technical School/College
 - F. Associate Degree
 - G. Bachelor Degree
 - H. Masters Degree
 - I. Beyond Master's Degree
17. Mother's Education:
- A. Less than High School
 - B. High School Diploma
 - C. Some College
 - D. Trade School
 - E. Technical School/College
 - F. Associate Degree
 - G. Bachelor Degree
 - H. Master's Degree

Appendix B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions

1. Briefly describe your high school experiences.
2. Explain your reason for returning to college?
3. Explain your reasons for choosing to attend Muskegon Community College or Aquinas College?
4. Has your experience at Muskegon Community College or Aquinas College been consistent with your expectations before arriving to campus?
5. As a nontraditional student, did you have any concerns about your academic abilities? If yes, why. If no, why not?
6. How do you view book learning in comparison to experiential learning?
7. Describe your experience in the classroom setting:
 - (a) Do you have classes/teachers who respect, expect, and encourage you to speak experientially?
 - (b) Do you have classes/teachers who do not respect, or encourage you to speak experientially?
 - (c) Do your instructors use a lecture format, or facilitation class environment (are you allowed to participate)?
8. Describe the classroom environment you prefer.
9. Describe the classroom environment that works best for your learning style.
10. Do you feel as though your identity is being silenced by the institution? If so, do you see differences between nontraditional and traditional female students on campus?
11. Describe the most serious obstacle you have had to overcome in pursuing your education.

The following patterns will also be examined: Between first and second-generation college students; Between students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in comparison to those from middle- to upper class backgrounds; If nontraditional female undergraduate students feel silenced, in what way? Is it because of their race/ethnic background, or other factors? Or, are there other barriers that hinder their academic success? These barriers will be categorized

into situational, institutional, and dispositional. Situational barriers are related to the circumstances and situations of the female nontraditional student. Institutional barriers are those factors that are outside of the control of the female nontraditional student, but are inside the control of the institution. Dispositional barriers can be defined as those barriers that are self-imposed psychologically.

Appendix C

**GENERAL GUIDELINES AND TOPICS
FOR THE FOCUS GROUP**

GENERAL GUIDELINE AND TOPICS FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

A Protocol for the Focus Group follows this summary. Below are some general guidelines. (NOTE: a focus group will be conducted at each institution)

- I. Introduction
 - A. Purpose of Focus Group (10)
 - B. Further explorations of student attitudes and experiences. (15 min)
- II.
 - A. General conversation focusing on why nontraditional female undergraduate students return to postsecondary education? (15 min)
 - B. Using a Likert Scale of 1 – 5, with one being the lowest on their overall satisfaction with their institutions, and 5 being the highest, what score would they give their respective institutions. (15)
 - C. If they had the opportunity to make one improvement to their institution, what would they change and why? In essence, what do they like best and least about their institutions? (15)
 - D. If you could change anything about your classroom environment (teaching/learning), what changes would you make? (15)

Appendix D
Request Letter for Nontraditional Female
Undergraduate Students
And
Consent Form

Request Letter for Nontraditional
Female Undergraduate Students
(NOTE: This letter will also be used for Aquinas College)

Date:

Dear:

My name is Beverly Ann Hair, and I am completing my Ph.D. degree in Sociology at Western Michigan University. I am conducting research on why nontraditional female undergraduate students return to postsecondary education, their preferred teaching/learning environments, and any barriers that make an impact on their academic success.

I would like to schedule an appointment to meet with you to sign a consent form, complete a short questionnaire, and for a one-on-one taped interview session. At this time, we can also schedule a day and time for you to participate with other Muskegon Community College participants at a informal focus group session. I believe that the benefit of your input will possibly impact future policies and practices in postsecondary education. Ultimately, the outcome of this research project will provide a database for administrators, so your campus can be made more compatible with the needs of nontraditional female undergraduate students.

The Human Subject Institutional Review Board and dissertation committee at Western Michigan University have approved this research. This documentation is available to you upon your request.

If you have any questions, I can be reached collect at (231) 767-2128, or email me at BEVERLYSPIRIT@aol.com. Thank you very much for your consideration in participating in this project.

Sincerely,

Beverly Ann Hair, BA, MA

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
H. S. I. R. B.
Approved for use for one year from this date:

AUG 01 2000

Sylvia Culp
HSIRB Chair

Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology
Principal Investigator: Dr. Douglas V. Davidson
Student Investigator: Beverly Ann Hair

I have been invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation research project entitled "Examining the Preferred Teaching/Learning Environments for Nontraditional Female Undergraduate Students: Pedagogy versus Andragogy." I have been informed that this research consists of three separate parts.

My consent to participate indicates that I will be asked to complete a survey form providing the researcher with demographic/background information. The second part will consist of one-on-one taped interview sessions, which will be conducted by the investigator on my time schedule. Lastly, an informal focus group session with is scheduled with other participants. Some of the information I will be asked for may be personal in nature. I may withdraw my consent to participate without penalty or effect on my grades or relationship to my institution. I have been informed that this three-part process will take approximately 4 hours.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to the participant except as otherwise stated in this consent.

I have also been informed that all information collected from me is strictly confidential. That means that my name will not be paired with my data, or appear on any papers of which this information is recorded and coded.

Although there may be no immediate benefits to my participating, there may eventually be benefits to the field of sociology of education and student services..

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner of all pages. I should not sign this document if the corner does not have a stamped date and signature. My signature below indicates that I have read and/or had explained to me the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact the principal investigator at (616) 387-5285 or the student investigator at (231) 767-2128. I may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (616) 387-8293 or the Vice President for research (616) 387-8298 with any concerns that I may have.

Signature

Print Name

Date

Appendix E

Approval Letter From Human Subjects
Institutional Review Board



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: 1 August 2000

To: Douglas V. Davidson, Principal Investigator
Beverly Ann Hair, Student Investigator for thesis or dissertation.

From: Sylvia Culp, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvia Culp".

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 00-06-07

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Case Studies on Nontraditional Female Undergraduate Students" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 01 August 2001

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